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## Reengineering English Language Teaching: Making the Shift towards 'Real' English

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### Abstract

This article underscores the importance of keeping up to date with vocabulary which is currently employed in English-speaking countries. It argues that textbooks, dictionaries and even corpora are not the most reliable sources to do this, and puts forward a pedagogical proposal – grounded in the Lexical Approach and three pedagogical innovation projects – to incorporate 'real' English into the language classroom. After clarifying what is meant by such 'real' English expressions and providing a possible classification for them, it suggests diverse sources of 'real' English input – including telecollaboration, sitcoms and TV series, podcasts, Internet texts, and recent bestsellers –, and subsequently presents a set of tried-and-true activities to exploit them, activities which allow the incorporation of pedagogically innovative approaches into the ELT classroom. The ultimate aim is to link the classroom with what goes on beyond its confines and to make our students' lexical competence approximate that of native English speakers.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, Vocabulary, Pedagogical innovation

### 1. Introduction

It is a known fact that "No language stays still" (Eaves-Walton 1999:6) and that "All languages change" (Swan 2005:4). This is particularly the case of the English language. Linguistic change is currently sped up by rapid worldwide communication, travel, or the media, and in the case of English, it is heightened by its global presence and *lingua franca* status. The result is pinpointed by Crystal (2000:6): "there has never been such a period of rapid and fundamental change since the explosions of development that lit the [English] language in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance".

This change is particularly conspicuous in the English lexicon; both Eaves-Walton (ibid) and Swan (ibid) document ongoing lexical innovation. Crystal (ibid:3) also underscores this point: "The bulk of the new distinctiveness of English is in vocabulary – by which I mean not just new words, but new meanings of words, and new idiomatic phrases".

It thus becomes incumbent upon us, as English teachers, to be up to speed with these new lexical chunks that are constantly entering the English language. Swan (ibid:6) subscribes the need to "keep an eye on what is happening" with a dual purpose: to answer the questions our students may have about these novel expressions and to modify our explanations when and where necessary. However, we believe keeping up to date with 'real' English expressions should have a more lofty goal: to make these lexical phrases part of our students' receptive and, hopefully, productive vocabulary, to ensure they do not make the effort to learn and use expressions which are stilted and obsolete, like the invariably taught 'It's raining cats and dogs' in Spain. If we seek for our students to emulate the language of native speakers (Widdowson 2008), we need to overcome the 'It's raining cats and dogs' syndrome in lexical acquisition.

How to go about this? Traditional answers are no longer acceptable. For example, one suggested possibility (Swan: ibid) is for authors of language textbooks, grammars, and dictionaries to be alert to language change in order to be responsive to it in their works. Swan also underlines the utility of language corpora to revamp language descriptions. However, we fully endorse Widdowson's (ibid) recent claim that dictionaries are limited in capturing the reality of English language in use. If English is a "patchwork of prefabricated phrases", dictionaries provide only a reduced account of this patchwork. Exemplification in dictionaries is often old-fashioned. Even in corpora, much of what is encountered may not be in use at all in present production. Thus, we need to look elsewhere for the solution.

Another oft-cited source of updated 'real' English are study abroad programmes. The latter, deemed essential in the current European and North American literature (Bologna Declaration 1999; Pratt *et al.* 2008), involve study periods in English-speaking countries, where direct contact with native speakers of the language can favour picking up English which is actually used. This option, while naturally being both valuable and useful, is not always the most desirable one for us as English teachers for four main reasons.

First, with the dramatic increase in international mobility, going to an English-speaking country is no longer a guarantee that we will encounter native-speaking individuals in the traditional places where students previously had the chance to practise the language (e.g. shops or restaurants). In this increasingly “global village”, it is common to find ourselves “in direct contact with dissimilar others in our neighbourhoods, schools, and workplace” (Ting-Toomey 1999:7). And even when direct encounters with native speakers do occur, we cannot guarantee our students will recognize or be aware of recent English expressions which they should incorporate into their lexicon. We need to find a way to raise their explicit attention to their existence and use. Plus, native speakers are not always the best source of updated English – their language can be just as stilted if they have been out touch with it for a period of time. In Eaves-Walton’s terms (op.cit.:6), for a native speaker, “a ‘slip’ may just be evidence of English getting past its ‘sell-by date’ – and that’s an expression I wouldn’t have used ten years ago!”. Finally, these sojourns to English-speaking countries are beyond our scope as language teachers – as Seidlhofer (2002) puts it, our aim is for students to incorporate the lexicon they receive as input *in the classroom*. The latter is our arena and we need to reflect on what we can do within it to foster ‘real’ English learning and use.

This is precisely the aim of the present article: to offer a selection of tried-and-true ways for teachers of English to overcome the ‘It’s raining cats and dogs’ syndrome in their classrooms. The paper will begin by clarifying what we mean by ‘real’ English vocabulary and by outlining what kinds of words and lexical phrases can be taught. The rationale in which this proposal is grounded shall then be presented, together with the three pedagogical innovation projects within which its didactic aspects are framed. The methodological suggestions for keeping up to date with and teaching these ‘real’ English expressions shall then be fleshed out, and the most outstanding conclusions will be drawn in the final section of the article.

## 2. What is ‘real’ English vocabulary?

The concept of ‘real’ English vocabulary involves single words and, especially, multi-word items which are currently employed in conversational English by native speakers of the language. They are often colloquial in use and enhance the native-like quality and fluency of the language of those who incorporate them into their productive vocabulary. To furnish an initial example, we often teach our students to respond to the common social formula ‘How are you?’ with expressions such as ‘I’m very well, thank you. And you?’, whereas in ‘real’ (American) English, the answer would be ‘I’m good, thanks’. Responding with the first option will only draw attention to the fact that the speaker does not pragmatically master the English language, whereas, in the second case, (s)he will be approximating the actual conventions of native English speakers.

While we fully endorse teaching general vocabulary related to the specific semantic fields which each concrete EFL subject requires, as well as expanding the academic lexicon of our students, we also subscribe the need to feed them this ‘real’ English vocabulary so that they not only recognize it when they encounter it, but also use it productively in their conversations.

As was previously mentioned, this vocabulary can take the form of single words, but pre-eminently of multi-word items, including collocations, phrasal verbs, gambits used to express functions, idiomatic expressions (including what Carter 1987 terms full idioms and semi-idioms), and lexical phrases or prefabricated routines. We also advocate familiarizing students with certain acronyms (or ‘netcronyms’, as they are coming to be called) of widespread use in electronic communication and which could function as sentence builders (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992) or sentence frames (Lewis 1997). The following table provides instances of each of these types of ‘real’ English words or phrases.

*Insert Table 1 here.*

## 3. Background and rationale

Our categorization of ‘real’ English lexicon is thus grounded in the increasingly acknowledged Lexical Approach (Nattinger and DeCarrico: op.cit.; Lewis: op.cit.). Considered a ‘promising new direction for language teaching’ (Nattinger and DeCarrico op.cit.:1) over 15 years ago, the Lexical Approach has become a sanctioned and prevalent approximation to language teaching. It maintains that the lexical chunk or phrase (a group of up to 8 words that conveys pragmatic meaning in a specific community) is the “ideal unit which can be exploited for language learning” (Nattinger and DeCarrico op.cit.:1).

Lexical chunks are pervasive in adult and child language, as well as in L1 production, and they present many advantages for language acquisition (Pérez Cañado 2002). They have an economizing and motivational role, they are seen as the basic organizing principle in language production, and are significant for lexical storage and retrieval. Lexical phrases are held to be the key to comprehensibility, efficient acquisition, and effective communication, as well as to fluency. The difference between speaking English well and very well is to be found in the much larger stock of ready-made expressions stored in the speaker’s mental lexicon and which (s)he can pull out automatically. Hence, the expansion of our students’ stock of multi-word units should be an essential objective in the language classroom, and it is through them that ‘real’ English materializes.

Our pedagogical proposal for implementing them is framed within three governmentally-financed pedagogical innovation projects developed with pre-service English teachers at the University of Jaén in Spain. The first of them, *La utilización de las nuevas tecnologías en la metodología ECTS: el caso de la telecolaboración* (2006-2007), used computer-mediated communication (CMC) and virtual learning environments (VLE) – the Blackboard platform – to establish a telecollaboration (TC) exchange between freshmen at the University of Jaén and pre-service language instructors at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Together, they had to co-operate on a weekly basis to accomplish a clear-cut set of tasks, with a primarily linguistic focus. The Dallas tutors provided language-related feedback to the Spanish English Philology freshmen, thus making the experience a language-based e-tutoring one.

In turn, the second pedagogical innovation project, *Las TIC en el ECTS: el desarrollo de la competencia léxica a través de la enseñanza virtual* (2006-2007) has also made use of a virtual learning environment – in this case, the ILIAS platform – to try to improve English Philology students' lexical competence in English. On the basis of popular and recent sitcoms and TV series which the students themselves selected (e.g. *Family Guy*, *Friends*, *House*, *CSI Las Vegas*, *Hot Properties*), a batch of original vocabulary activities has been designed to expand and reinforce the vocabulary of the main lexical fields which the students are expected to master (e.g. family, health, crime, technology, marriage). They have been completed on the ILIAS platform, combined with face-to-face interaction, thus drawing on blended learning.

The final project, *INNOFIL: La innovación docente en Filología Inglesa en el marco del EEES* (2007-2009), has also attempted to improve the lexical competence of English Philology students, as alarmingly low results in this area were detected in the academic years prior to 2004-2005. Now, podcasts and extremely updated Internet texts have been employed to work on 'real' English, as well as to develop the listening and reading comprehension of our pre-service English teachers. Blended learning has once again permeated the experience.

#### 4. How to teach 'real' English: Pedagogical proposals

We now use these pedagogical innovation projects as a basis to illustrate how 'real' English words and, especially, lexical phrases can be taught, and the main sources from which they can be drawn.

##### 4.1. Using telecollaboration

Having our students correspond on a regular basis with a native English-speaking tutor within the classroom context is an ideal way of accessing 'real' English. Not only do they have the possibility of communicating (orally and in writing) with a native speaker their age; we as teachers have the chance to monitor and guide their performance in order to keep the project on target, since each exchange is recorded on the platform for our subsequent supervision. Thus, we can steer our students' interactions, raising their awareness to the expressions we consider relevant, while at the same time boosting their autonomy and capacity for cooperation.

Our students made the most of the TC experience by asking their tutors grammatically related questions, cultural queries, and, of course, lexically-driven inquiries (Pérez Cañado and Ware 2009). In this sense, the Spanish pre-service teachers explicitly asked their e-tutors to provide them with 'real' English expressions in their exchanges:

**Q:** Please send me more vocabulary you use normally and I ask you for the next mail info about the phrasal verbs, I want you to send me the more common or usual phrasal verbs that I'm supposed to know!

**A:** I love my friends, and I think we'll be **hitting up** (going to) the drive-in very soon! We try to vary our weekend activities so we don't get bored. [...] I attached a song by a band I'm pretty obsessed with right now, and **I'm so stoked** (excited) about seeing them in concert in two months! [...]

About the phrasal verbs, I found this very useful website a few weeks ago. Here's the link: <http://www.englishpage.com/prepositions/phrasaldictionary.html>

Let me know if you have any problems understanding or navigating the website, but I thought I'd pass it along for quick reference.

Also, the words I highlighted are slang words I found when I reread my post to you. I included their definition in case you're unfamiliar with them, but also let me know what other kind of vocabulary you'd like to learn (anything specific) or if I forget to define a word you don't know.

And, even more interestingly, they began to use them productively themselves, thereby making the transition from what Krashen (1999) terms learning to acquisition:

• Happy New Year!!!! Perhaps it's a bit late, I know. Anyway, how was your Christmas?? I hope you have had a good time with your family and friends and you have relaxed. I have stayed at home. I celebrated Christmas Eve having dinner with my family and then, **hung out with my friends**.

- Hi again. How's it going? I hope good. I'm writing to you because I need help on the two previous exercises. They're a report and a discussion. I've lost a lot of time, so I would like to catch up with my work. I would like you to provide examples of each and correct mine. I hope you don't get worked up. Thanks in advance.

They also claimed to have picked up expressions from the e-mails their Dallas partners sent them (especially opening, closings, and netronyms), which they then began to use themselves: 'while I talk or send an e-mail, I find I use some expressions or new words I have learned, unconsciously'. This is especially relevant, since, as Pennock-Speck asserts (2009:175), "a significant part of the information we receive and send comes to us through emails, attachments, web pages, and so it's particularly apt for students to learn [...] through a computer-mediated communication system".

A useful way of supplementing a TC experience of this nature is with what we call a face-to-face 'coffee and talk' session. Here, we invite a group of 10 to 15 native English speakers from different backgrounds (American, English, Irish, Canadian) to talk in an informal environment with our Spanish students, thereby also promoting the encounter with 'real' English expressions.

#### 4.2. Making the most of sitcoms and TV series

Recent and popular sitcoms and TV series are another invaluable means, from our experience, to focus on 'real' English vocabulary. They are an extremely motivating way of providing exposure to actually used and updated expressions in different varieties of English, as the latter is used by a hugely diverse community of speakers and each one will have its functioning or operative variety (Harmer, 2009). Thus, sitcoms need not be limited to the standard American or British ones, but can also instantiate the so-called 'world Englishes', including not only Scottish or Irish accents and vocabulary, but also South African, Indian, or even Nigerian English, through the use of series, movies, or clips from, e.g., Bollywood or Nollywood. This will help students become familiarized, from a receptive point of view, with the language which is actually used outside the confines of the classroom and, from a productive one, to foster their fluency through the use of such expressions. In our project, explicit attention was drawn to such lexical phrases through diverse activities in a virtual learning environment. Following the pedagogical principles of the Lexical Approach (Nattinger and DeCarrico: op.cit.; Lewis: op.cit.), we have employed the following types of exercises:

- Gap-filling:

***Insert Figure 1 here.***

- Translation of 'real' English chunks:

***Insert Figure 2 here.***

- Guessing from context through discovery-based procedures aided by computer corpora:

***Insert Figure 3 here.***

Productive practice:

***Insert Figure 4 here.***

#### 4.3. The value of podcasts and Internet texts

These same types of activities can and have been employed to teach 'real' English expressions drawn from other sources: podcasts and Internet texts. The possibilities offered by the WorldWideWeb in this sense are unique: unlimited access to extremely updated written texts and auditory files which focus on motivating topics for our students and which directly connect to the main semantic fields we need to cover in class.

Again, to provide specific instances, one of the first topics which our students need to master involves physical descriptions and clothes. We have expanded this lexicon and focused on 'real' English expressions related to it through the text 'Oscars 2008: Fashion and Make-up Recap!' (available at [http://lifeofaladybug.typepad.com/the\\_life\\_of\\_a\\_ladybug/2008/02/oscars-2008-fas.html](http://lifeofaladybug.typepad.com/the_life_of_a_ladybug/2008/02/oscars-2008-fas.html)) and through the podcast '2008 Academy Awards Fashion Wrap' (available on Youtube). Both provide a fun post-mortem on the physical appearance of some of the stars our students admire most and allow the introduction of a vast gamut of 'real' English expressions (e.g. 'He is some hotness!' when describing Patrick Dempsey or 'She is a fave' when alluding to Marion Cotillard). Youtube is also a priceless source of documents to work on updated English in a motivating way: for example, we have used some medicine commercials currently showing in the States (e.g. Zyrtec, Singulair, Advil) to work on vocabulary related to health from a different perspective to that provided by the textbook.

#### 4.4. Championing all types of literature

A final invaluable source of 'real' English input involves, in our experience, recent bestsellers and the oftentimes disparaged 'airport literature'. Recently written books by bestselling authors from diverse English-speaking backgrounds (e.g. Marian Keyes, Sophie Kinsella, Lauren Weisberger, Jennifer Weiner) are perfectly valid and extremely useful for students to receive extensive input of actually used English. Their attention to lexical chunks can



then be drawn via activities which explicitly target those expressions of interest to us. Merely reading such literature, however, has proved beneficial for vocabulary acquisition, as Krashen (op.cit.:58-60) documents with case histories of readers. Four subjects (three speakers of Korean and one of Spanish) found their reading experiences to be extremely helpful in understanding television and telephone conversations, in reading much more speedily and effortlessly, and in speaking easily, confidently, and without hesitation. As Krashen puts it, "They reported enjoying the reading enormously, made impressive gains on tests of vocabulary, and reported great improvement in their English" (op.cit.: 58).

#### 4.5. Towards pedagogical innovation in teaching 'real' English

The afore-mentioned activities for working on 'real' English lexical chunks are clearly in line with the pedagogical principles of the *Lexical Approach* (Nattinger and Decarrico: op.cit.; Lewis: op.cit.). The overwhelming majority of scholars in this field are invariably in favour of the overt, explicit, and formal teaching of these items, endorsing the importance of raising students' awareness of their existence. They propound teaching them following discovery-based procedures with the aid of corpora; through translation, gap-filling exercises, and extensive reading and listening; and by making language lessons a combination of input, awareness-raising, learner training, and language practice, which is exactly what we have done through the means outlined in the previous three subheadings of this section. The need for high-quality input is also emphasized by Lewis (op.cit.), something which can successfully be provided through the sources we have presented.

However, the Lexical Approach is not the only recent method which is incorporated in our proposal for teaching 'real' English. *Cooperative Learning* clearly comes into play in telecollaboration, as the students on both ends of the exchange must work together to achieve a joint outcome for which they are both accountable. The fact that this observable outcome is the result of a set of clear-cut tasks also brings *Task-Based Learning* (TBL) into the picture. *Autonomous* or *Lifelong Learning* (LLL), so trendy now in the European context, equally come to the fore, as the bulk of the activities the students are expected to complete in the virtual learning environments and through computer-mediated communication are done outside the classroom, within their private or individual study time, albeit under the guidance of the instructor. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning* (CALL) and *blended learning* obviously run through the experience, via the use of VLE, CMC, and web-based authentic material (e.g. podcasts and Internet texts). Finally, *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) pervades the pedagogical proposal, as the aim is precisely to link classroom learning to what goes on beyond its confines to the greatest extent possible, the onus being on using 'real' English expressions in oral and written communication.

### 5. Conclusion

In the English teaching profession, we often tend to rely excessively on the textbook, the dictionary, or even the linguistic corpus. In this article, we have argued that these sources are no longer valid in making the link with the 'real' English language which is currently being used beyond the confines of the classroom, especially at a time of tremendous linguistic change like the one we are living. After clarifying what we mean by such 'real' English lexical chunks and classifying them, we have put forward a pedagogical proposal for keeping up to date with English vocabulary in the ELT classroom. Diverse sources of input, such as telecollaboration and 'coffee and talk' sessions with native English speakers, sitcoms and TV series, podcasts, Internet texts, and recent bestsellers, have been suggested, together with possible ways to exploit them in line with trendy language teaching methods – CALL, blended learning, cooperative learning, autonomous and lifelong learning, CLT, or TBL – which favour pedagogical innovation.

Language teachers, perhaps more than any other teaching profession, have to constantly check the pulse of what is happening with their object of study. We have to be, in Swans's terms (op.cit.:6), "English watchers". We hope the ideas put forward in this article can work towards attaining this important endeavour. Only then will we be able to confidently send our students out into the English-speaking world and reframe ourselves back into relevant English language teaching.

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Table 1. Examples of 'real' English words and multi-word items

<b>Words</b>	Whatever!
	A rip-off
	Awesome!
<b>Multi-word items</b>	
<b>Collocations</b>	A rave review
	Pretty bad
	Drop-dead gorgeous
	Way better
<b>Phrasal verbs</b>	To freak someone out
	To hang out with someone
	To blow someone off
	To check someone out
	How are you holding up?
	It just doesn't add up.
<b>Gambits used to express functions</b>	Right back at you! ( <i>To respond to a compliment</i> )
	Here's the thing. ( <i>To introduce a topic</i> )
	Will you finish already?! ( <i>To express impatience</i> )
	Is this good or what?
	How weird is that?
	( <i>To ask for agreement</i> )
<b>Idiomatic expressions</b>	You really don't want to go there. ( <i>To give advice</i> )
	To take a raincheck
	It's a no-go.
	Cut me some slack!
	That goes without saying.
<b>Lexical phrases or prefabricated routines</b>	It's so last year!
	It's your call.
	Not going to happen!
	Dream on!
<b>Acronyms</b>	FYI
	FWIW
	BTW
	IMO



Figure 1

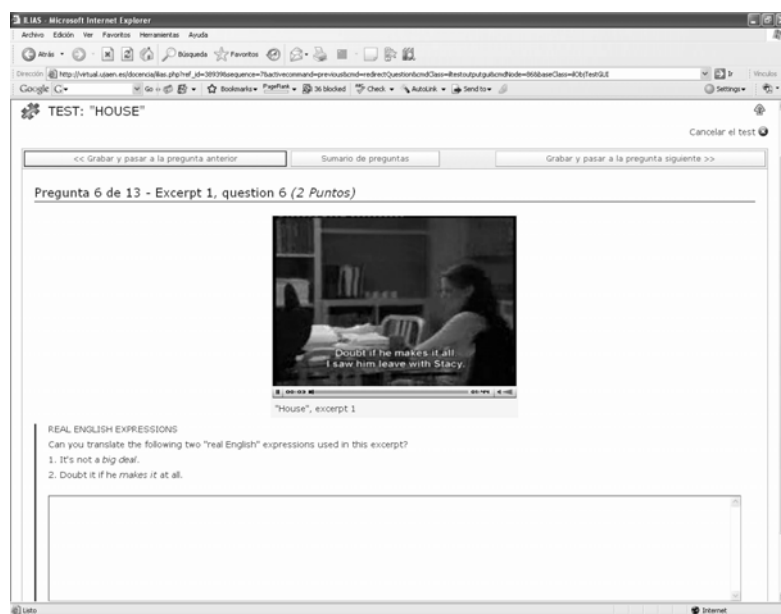


Figure 2

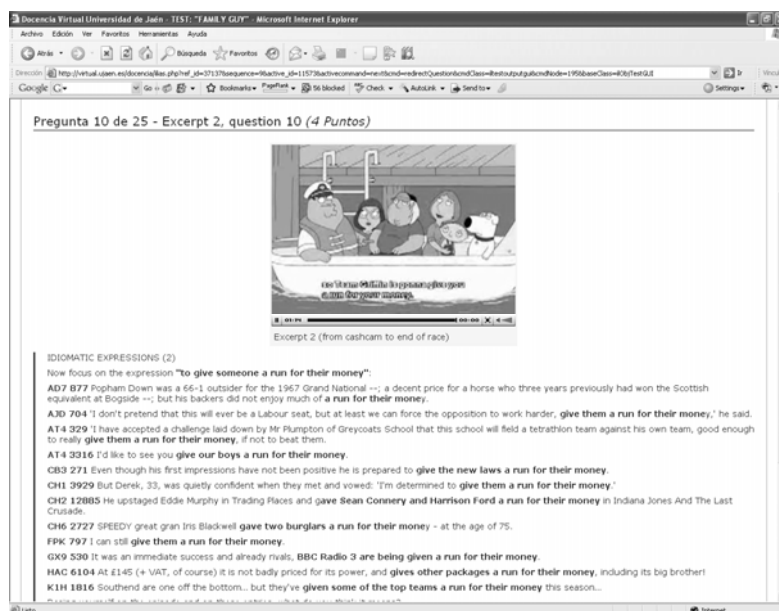


Figure 3

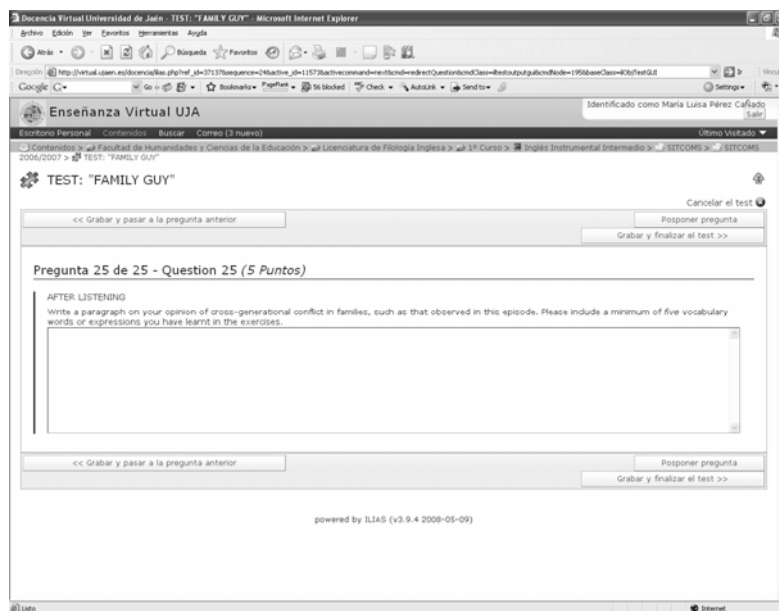


Figure 4



## Improvement of Speaking Ability through Interrelated Skills

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### Abstract

How to improve students' ability of speaking English? That is the key point we are concerned about. This paper discusses the possibility and necessity of improving students' ability by combining the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

**Keywords:** Speaking ability, Improvement, Integrated skills

With the rapid development of science and technology, international trade and exchanges between countries increase greatly. Therefore, it is becoming more and more necessary to understand spoken English in different situations.

### 1. Reasons of Causing Less Effective Teaching

How to develop the ability of oral communication of students in colleges and universities? How to help them communicate freely and make them express their ideas clearly? These are questions troubling many teachers. Why is it so hard to get our students to speak English fluently? I believe there may be several reasons:

A. In previous years the methodology was teacher-centred with a focus only on reading or writing. Grammar was considered of primary importance and was often taught through a separate grammar book. Vocabulary teaching consisted mainly of memorization either of synonyms or Chinese 'equivalents'. Writing lessons consisted of memorization and writing of model compositions, combined with grammar and vocabulary exercises. Speaking skills were not dealt with seriously in any way (students were not expected to interact).

B. Most of the teaching activities are of the traditional modes, such as reading the dialogue, reciting texts, doing translation, and the materials chosen for the students are non-authentic. Usually students feel deadly bored instead of appreciating them and accepting them.

C. Many teachers only lay emphasis on accuracy with no thought of fluency, which makes students worry too much about their mistakes.

D. Almost all important examinations do not consist of an oral test, which causes both the teachers and students to neglect oral English.

E. Teachers are reluctant in using Communicative Approach because of their deficiency in speaking ability themselves.

F. Students' attitude towards their learning process is also a factor that causes less effective teaching.

### 2. Analysis of Current Teaching Approaches

Although speaking has been included in the educational plan for English teaching in colleges and universities in the past years, the percentage of time devoted to activities in which students can communicate with each other in English remains small in the whole class. Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situation. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensibly. So, as teachers, we have a responsibility to prepare the students as much as possible to be able to speak English in the real world outside the classroom and the testing room.

Speaking is a skill, just like swimming, driving a car, or playing ping-pong. Too often, in the traditional classroom, the learning of English has been relegated to linguistic knowledge only, e.g. knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules, with little or no attention paid to practicing language skills. How can we tell the difference between knowledge and skill? Bygate (1987:4) points out "one fundamental difference is that both can be understood and memorized, but only a skill can be imitated and practiced." One of the characteristics of speech in everyday life is that speech is spontaneous. That is, in most situations, people do not plan ahead of time what they are going to say. Only in more formal situations, such as when a person has been asked to give a speech, do people plan and organize their speech.

Similarly, the method of giving priority to listening and speaking has been advocated, yet it has little effect. Both teachers and students think it neither realistic nor necessary to teach or learn speaking. It seems to them that their main objective is reading not speaking. They may also think speaking is not a skill worth cultivating because Chinese

students have little chance to communicate with native speakers. And more readily they will admit that whether the students can go to university or a college mainly depends on the reading and writing, not speaking, for almost all the important examinations do not consist of oral tests.

Pattern drills are often arranged in each unit of textbooks, most of which are not authentic but mechanical. They do not reflect the real purpose of communicative ideas. Many textbooks are crammed with a lot of grammar, reading materials and too many boring vocabulary exercises.

In addition, many teachers themselves are not fluent in speaking English, nor do they know how to teach it in a big class. It is really difficult for a teacher to get everybody to have the chance to practise speaking English.

Let me take "dialogue teaching" as an example. Most teachers of English follow the traditional way: learn the vocabulary, read the dialogue, translate it into Chinese, have difficult points explained, memorize the dialogue. As a result, an overwhelming majority of students cannot make themselves understood, let alone talk with the native speakers after years of learning English.

### 3.Theories of Teaching Oral English

#### A. Functions of Spoken Language

Brown & Yule (1983a: 1-3; 1983b: 11-16) mention that language can be seen as having two functions: transferring information (transactional function) and establishing/maintaining social relationships (interactional function). Interactional spoken language is characterised by shifts of topic and short turns. The accuracy and clarity of information is not of primary importance, and facts/views are not normally questioned or challenged. In transactional spoken language longer turns are the norm and there is a clear topic. Since the effective transference of information is the goal, interlocutors are actively engaged in the negotiation of meaning. Brown & Yule summarise the above stating that whereas interactional language is "listener oriented", transactional language is "message oriented".

#### B. The Possibility and Necessity of Teaching Oral English

In my opinion, those who think the major objective of the students is reading not speaking have ignored some obvious pedagogical facts :

Firstly, generally speaking, people have the notion that learning English has something to do with oral English. When one says some students are good at English, people will naturally think he or she can speak English well.

Secondly, oral English can be very useful for the development of reading and writing skills. As Rivers points out: when we read and write, we call upon what we know of the language orally. (Rivers, 1968, 20). He goes on to say that there must be a connection between reading and speaking. If the students are reading, then they are using their oral English, too. If a student has poor English, his reading ability may also be poor. Similarly, Rivers (1968) argues that writing involves oral ability as well.

Although many teachers with poor oral ability may have some difficulty in teaching English, however, it is possible for them to do so. They may teach oral English by an indirect method. They may use a recorder to provide an authentic accent and some authentic materials like dialogue for students to imitate. They can also make good use of class time for active participation by all their students. So the teachers can make up for their deficiency in oral ability by encouraging the students' participation with prepared lessons, highly organized activities and effective techniques.

#### C. The Importance of Using Integrated Skills in Teaching Oral English

As Harmer suggests: one skill cannot be performed without another. It is impossible to speak in a conversation if you do not listen as well, and people seldom write without reading (Harmer, 1991, 52).

The table below shows how all four skills are related (Byrne, 1991, 8).

Spoken Language	Understanding ,Speaking
Receptive Skills	Understanding ,Reading
Productive Skills	Speaking, Writing
Written Language	Reading ,Writing

Since the four language skills of listening , speaking reading and writing are interrelated and interacted with each other , it may be suggested that the four basic skills should be taught inclusively rather than separately ,as Byrne argues, we need to see why integrated skills activities are important :

- They provide opportunities for using activities naturally, not just practicing it .
- Many pair and group work activities call for a variety of skills sometimes simultaneously, in order to involve all the

learners.

c) Students seem to learn better when they are engaged on activities more than one skill. (1991,130)

Therefore, when we teach oral English, we should get the students involved in an oral communicative activity to do some writing or reading or listening in order to accomplish the task which the activity asks them to perform.

#### *D. Integrating Skills in Activities*

Byrne argues that: "we are not of course suggesting that single skill activities are not effective: there will in fact be many occasions when we shall ask the students just to talk or read or write, because this is appropriate." He then emphasizes, "equally, however, we should be looking for opportunities to knit skills together, because this is what happens in real life." (Byrne, 1976, 131). As we all know, the main aim of foreign language teaching is to help students achieve some kinds of communicative skills in the foreign language. Therefore, the teacher should organize classroom activities, create a free atmosphere within the class or group and give the students hints to use the activities in class to integrate their skills.

The following activities may be well recommended to show how to integrate skills by getting the students to work in pairs or groups:

##### *a. Communication Activities*

- Describing and drawing.
- Finding the difference between two partially identical pictures.

Rixon & Byrne (1979) and Harmer (1983) refer to the above two activities as "communication games".)

- Discussing ideas/views/opinions -notably students are engaged in activities in which they have to:
  - Choose from a list of (unalterable) given statements the ones they most agree/disagree with.
  - Choose from a list of given statements the ones they agree with and modify the remaining ones according to their opinion.
  - Rank a number of statements according to their beliefs/opinions.
  - Agree on and formulate statements expressing their views on a given subject and then discuss them in different groups (having to reformulate the ones they disagree on according to the second group's opinion).

The activities mentioned are selected/adopted in order to provide the students with a context in which they can re-integrate the strategies/skills dealt with in each lesson, and to lead students to "become used to dealing with the kinds of unpredictable problems which reciprocal speech brings into (these) interaction situations" (notably informal discussion and informal planning/decision making). Bygate terms these activities as "two-way" and argues that they "generate more talk and more use of negotiation procedures".

Such activities are "functional communication activities" ("processing information" and "sharing and processing information"). The stimulus for communication comes from the need to discuss and evaluate (these) facts. Learners must agree, justify and persuade in order to reach a common decision. Some experts refer to such activities as "interaction activities" in which personal meaning can be conveyed.

##### *b. Questionnaires*

Questionnaires are a simple way of giving the students meaningful question and answer practice. For use they should relate to a topic of some kinds, e.g. like and dislike about food, activities, abilities etc. the answer required should be either yes or no, or one of the frequency adverbs (never, hardly ever, sometimes, quite often, etc.)

If students are going to write their own questionnaires, it is helpful to elicit some ideas from the class first and perhaps write these on the board. Then ask the students to make up their own questionnaires, using some of these items. They can work in pairs for this, thus providing an additional source of talk. They may interview more than one student. They can also be asked to report what they have learned to another student or to the whole class.

When students of pairs or groups collaborate on the production of the questionnaire, they will talk and write. At the interviewing stage, they integrate talking and writing as well. In comparing the results, they have reading and talking.

##### *c. Quizzes*

Quizzes are similar to questionnaires but the answers are usually factual, which often involve knowledge. To turn quiz writing into an oral practice activity, you must ask the students to work in pairs to produce the quiz. This will involve talking and writing. Each pair should then ask another pair of students to answer the quiz orally, which involves some talking, listening and writing as well. When the quiz is passed back to the students who write it, they will get reading and talking integrated.

In short, from those types of activities suggested above, we may notice that those activities can introduce a "talk" component into the normally silent activities of reading and writing. We may also find how purposefully the skills are used in the way in which the students talk, read or write "in order to get something done" (Byrne, 1976, 132).

#### 4. Conclusion

The choice of the topic was greatly determined by the fact that very little attention had been given to student interaction and speaking ability during the previous years. As a result, students had developed inhibitions towards using the target language that had a negative impact on their oral performance. It would, therefore, be an opportunity and a challenge for me to examine the effectiveness of certain activities and techniques in helping students shed their inhibitions and become more fluent communicators. By discussing and exploring how to integrate the skills in activities to make the teaching of oral English more effective, I hope we can find more methods to improve speaking ability of our students through interrelated skills.

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## The Use of Apologies by EFL Learners

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the act of apologizing with subjects from two different levels of English proficiency to find out whether there are similarities and differences between these groups and whether they approach native speaker apology norms. 20 subjects in intermediate level, 20 subjects in advanced level and 5 native speakers of English participate in the study. The data are gathered by a Discourse Completion Test that had 8 apology situations. In the analysis of the data, all responses are categorized according to Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology speech act set. The results of the study reveal some similarities and differences between the two groups. Their L1 can be said to have an influence on their use of apologies, especially intermediate level subjects transfer native Turkish speaker norms into English.

**Keywords:** Communicative competence, Speech acts, Cross-cultural speech act studies, Discourse completion test, apologies

### 1. Introduction

Communicative competence has been the goal of teaching a second/foreign language and has gained importance in recent years since its introduction by Hymes in 1960s. As Hymes (1972) points out communicative competence involves not only rules of the language but also abstract knowledge about social and functional rules of language. For Hymes, knowledge of linguistic rules is supported by the competence of using the language appropriately in situations. As it is suggested in literature, while acquiring the language, native speakers of a language also acquire the knowledge of rules and choose among the speech acts when communicating with others. However, the situation is different when people learn a second/foreign language since speech acts have been accepted as one of the troublesome points in learning a second/foreign language (Wolfson 1989; Harlow 1990; Schmidt and Richards 1980). It has been claimed in literature that second/foreign language learners face problems in using speech acts as their usage requires sociopragmatic competence. Although speech acts are universal and can be found nearly in all languages, their usage differs according to the culture of the community. Cross-cultural studies of speech acts have shown that L2 learners face problems in using speech acts when they communicate with native speakers of the target language (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Kasper 1990; Beebe et. al 1990; Koike 1989; Cohen and Olshtain 1993).

The speech act of apologies has also been investigated cross-culturally and some similarities and differences have been found between cultures in the use of apologies (Olshtain 1983; Garcia 1989; Suszczynska 1999; Cohen and Olshtain 1993; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). The studies mentioned above have been carried out in second language learning situations. The studies which have been carried out in EFL situation are the studies of Erçetin (1995) and Tunçel (1999). They have carried out studies on the use of apologies in a foreign language learning situation with EFL learners in Turkey and found out differences resulting from the culture of the learners.

The aim of this study is to investigate the act of apologizing with subjects from different levels of English proficiency in order to find out whether there are similarities and differences between their usage of apologies and whether they approach native speaker norms in using apologies.

The study tried to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the formulas used by intermediate and advanced level subjects in apology situations?
- 2) Are there any similarities and differences between their use of apologies?
- 3) Do they approach native speaker norms in using apologies?

### 2. A Brief Review of Literature

#### 2.1 Communicative Competence

According to Richards et. al (1985) communicative competence includes knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary of the language, rules of speaking, knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts and knowing how to use

language appropriately. Hymes has been accepted as a mentor in communicative competence approach and he views language behavior in terms of its appropriateness and correctness (İstifçi, 1998:12). Many researchers have agreed that communicative competence should be the goal of L2 teaching and communicative competence of learners should include the ability of how language is used in social contexts to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse (Loveday 1982, Canale and Swain 1980).

Canale and Swain (ibid.) identified four components of communicative competence such as grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Sociolinguistic competence includes appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form and for nonnative speakers every situation is potentially unfamiliar because of unknown sociolinguistic conventions (Shaw, 1992). Being a part of sociolinguistic competence, sociopragmatic competence in a language includes not only linguistic and lexical knowledge but also knowing how to vary speech act strategies according to the situational or social variables in communication (Harlow, 1990).

## 2.2 Speech Acts

Speech acts can be defined as the basic unit of communication and they are part of linguistic competence. As Schmidt and Richards (1980) state speech acts are all the acts we perform through speaking, all the things we do when we speak and the interpretation and negotiation of speech acts are dependent on the discourse or context. There are a series of analytic connections between the notion of speech acts, what the speaker means, what the sentence uttered means, what the speaker intends, what the hearer understands, and what the rules governing the linguistic elements are (Searle 1969; cited in Schiffrin 1994:54). Speech act theory has gained importance with Austin (1975) and Searle (1969, 1976) who have made a distinction between what is actually said (locution), what is intended by what is said (illocution) and what is done by what is said (perlocution) (cited in İrman, 1996:39). According to Brown & Levinson (1987) the locutionary aspect has to do with 'the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference', the illocutionary aspect with 'the naming of a statement, offer, promise in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it', whereas the perlocutionary aspect deals with 'the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance'. As research in this area suggests, the illocutionary force has been the concern of researchers who are interested in speech acts. Searle (1976) classifies speech acts with illocutionary aspect into some basic types such as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

Speech acts have also been classified as direct and indirect speech acts. According to Searle (ibid.) one speech act is brought about indirectly by performing another one in indirect speech acts and their interpretation changes according to the situation, the manner of speaking and to whom people speak. As Fraser (1978) claims indirect speech acts with illocutionary force are same across languages but their distribution, function and frequency of occurrence may show differences. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) there are inter-cultural, cross-cultural and individual differences in using speech acts. Second language learners have been claimed to have disadvantages in using speech acts to communicate with native speakers of the target language because of the complexity of speech acts since they are conditioned by social, cultural, situational and personal factors (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993). Second language learners generally try to apply the rules they use in their first language when they speak in the second language. Thus, the result is communication breakdown or communication conflict.

## 2.3 Interlanguage Pragmatics

Interlanguage can be defined as the type of language produced by second and foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a language (Richards et. al, 1985). According to Ellis (1985) interlanguage is the systematic knowledge of language which is independent of both the learner's L1 and L2 system. Before 1970s, interlanguage studies were generally carried out to see grammatical development of L2 learners. However, by the emergence of communicative competence approach, interlanguage studies gave emphasis to the interactional and communicative dynamics of L2 performance. Thus, the term 'interlanguage pragmatics' came into existence. According to Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993) interlanguage pragmatics is the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language and it places an emphasis on the pragmatic study that focuses on people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context (Tunçel 1999:39). As Thomas (1983) states, L2 learners transfer L1 speech act rules into L2, so they engage in pragmalinguistic failure or their different perceptions about correct linguistic behavior cause sociopragmatic failure.

## 2.4 Speech Act of Apologies

The act of apologizing is called for when there is some behavior which has violated social norms. When an action or utterance has resulted in the fact that one or more persons perceive themselves as offended, the culpable person(s) needs to apologize. We are dealing here, therefore, with two parties: an apologizer and an apologizee. However, only if the

person who caused the infraction perceive himself or herself as an apologizer do we get the act of apologizing. The act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance which is intended to “set things right” (Olshtain, 1983:235).

As Marquez-Reiter (2000: 44) states an apology is a “compensatory action for an offense committed by the speaker which has affected the hearer. According to Bataneh & Bataneh (2006:1903) apologies fall under expressive speech acts in which speakers attempt to indicate their state or attitude. They add that in order for an apology to have an effect, it should reflect true feelings.

As Searle (1979) states a person who apologizes for doing A expresses regret at having done A so the apology act can take place only if the speaker believes that some act A has been performed prior to the time of speaking and that this act A resulted in an infraction which affected another person who is now deserving an apology (Olshtain, *ibid.*, 235).

Apology speech acts have been investigated cross-culturally in order to find similarities and differences between the languages. The studies have generally been carried out in situations where learners learn the target language as their second language. The studies have shown that some learners employ language transfer from their L1, some learners approximate native speaker norms or some learners use completely different formulas different from the formulas they use in their L1 or L2.

Having carried out a study with 44 college subjects and comparing the use of apologies in Hebrew and English, Olshtain and Cohen (1993) found that native speakers’ apology forms are patterned and nonnative speakers deviate from native speaker norms because of transfer and lack of proficiency.

Olshtain (1983) carried out a study with 63 college subjects (12 native English speakers, 12 native Hebrew subjects, 12 Russian subjects and 13 English speakers learning Hebrew at Teacher’s College in Jerusalem) to compare their apology usage. According to the results obtained from his study, he claimed that English speakers’ data differed from native Hebrew data and they employed transfer. He used the categorization of Cohen and Olshtain (1981) such as:

- 1) An expression of apology (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device IFID)
  - a) an expression of regret (e. g. I’m sorry)
  - b) an offer of apology (e.g. I apologize)
  - c) a request for forgiveness (e.g. excuse me, forgive me)
- 2) An offer of repair/redress (REPR) (e.g. I’ll pay for your damage)
- 3) An explanation of an account (EXPL) (e.g. I missed the bus)
- 4) Acknowledging responsibility for the offense (RESP) (e.g. It’s my fault)
- 5) A promise of forbearance (FORB) (e.g. I’ll never forget it again)

Olshtain and Blum-Kulka (1985) carried out a study on requests and apologies with native speakers of Hebrew and learners of Hebrew. They found that the learners of Hebrew approached native speaker norms when they had the same rules in their native languages and deviated from native speakers when they had language-specific rules. They also found that nonnatives’ length of stay in the target language community affected their choice of the formulas.

Erçetin (1995; cited in Tunçel 1999:49) carried out a study on the use of apologies by Turkish EFL learners and she claimed that EFL learners exhibited transfer from Turkish. Tunçel (1999) also carried out a study on the use of apologies and thanking with 129 EFL learners at Anadolu University, 50 native American and British speakers and 44 native Turkish speakers. His findings suggested that EFL learners exhibited transfer in the use of apologies from their L1 in some situations (e.g. the situation in which a driver dents the side of someone else’s car or the situation in which a classmate does not return a book on time). He found that Turkish EFL learners transferred some sociocultural norms of Turkish into English in above mentioned situations like blaming the driver or a friend instead of apologizing. He adds that transfer of the rules of L1 can cause misunderstandings and failure in communication.

### 3. Methodology

As it was stated in previous parts of this study, the use apologies was selected for this study because apology speech acts were found to reflect cultural values. It has also been suggested in literature that proficient learners use speech acts appropriately in communicating with native speakers of the target language. Thus, subjects of this study were 20 subjects from one of the intermediate level classes and 20 subjects in advanced level class. The data gathered from these subjects were used to find similarities and differences between the groups. In order to find native speaker norms, the data gathered from 5 native speakers of English. The data were collected using a Discourse Completion Test which had 8 apology situations.

#### 3.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were 20 intermediate level EFL learners, 20 advanced level EFL learners and 5 native speakers of English at Preparatory School of Anadolu University. The subjects in this school had taken the Michigan

Placement Test at the beginning of the term and had been placed into different classes according to their proficiency levels. Subjects who scored between 46-60 were accepted as intermediate level subjects and subjects who scored between 76-100 were accepted as advanced level subjects. Although there were 7 intermediate classes at Preparatory School, one class of intermediate subjects and one class of advanced subjects served as the subjects of the study. Their ages ranged from 18-22.

Native speakers of English are the teachers in Prep School. Their ages ranged from 26-37 and all of them have been in Turkey for more than two years. Although the number of native teachers was 5, it was thought that their answers to Discourse Completion Test could give an idea about native speaker usage of apologies.

### 3.2 Discourse Completion Test

The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was taken from Tunçel (1999) and it had been adapted from other DCTs used in literature (Cohen and Olshtain 1981, Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, Tillett and Bruder 1985 and Bergman and Kasper 1993; cited in Tunçel 1999:57). The original version of the test consisted of 14 apology situations and they had been pilot tested before the actual study. The reliability of the test was 75%. The test in this study consisted of 8 situations which were taken from Tunçel (ibid.) and they started with a description of the situation. The subjects were wanted to write the first thing that came into their minds. The situations in this study were organized according to the severity of the offense and social status of the apologizer and apologizee (see Appendix A for the discourse completion test).

EFL subjects were also given a short background questionnaire to have an idea about their age, sex and if they had been abroad. Native English speakers also completed the background questionnaire, they wrote about their country of origin, age, sex and the duration of their residence in Turkey.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

DCT was applied to EFL subjects in their usual class hours by their usual core course teachers and they were instructed to write the first thing that came into their minds regarding the situation they were in and the person they were interacting. In the analysis of the data, all responses were categorized according to Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) apology speech act set. According to their categorization, there were 5 main categories such as the following:

- 1) An expression of apology (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device IFID)
  - a. an expression of regret (e. g. I'm sorry)
  - b. an offer of apology (e.g. I apologize)
  - c. a request for forgiveness (e.g. excuse me, forgive me)
- 2) An offer of repair/redress (REPR) (e.g. I'll pay for your damage)
- 3) An explanation of an account (EXPL) (e.g. My daughter was ill, I took her to hospital)
- 4) Acknowledging responsibility for the offense (RESP) (e.g. It's my fault)
- 5) A promise of forbearance (FORB) (e.g. I'll never forget it again)

As Tunçel (ibid.) states the above list did not cover all the responses of his subjects, so he added some other categories into the list such as:

- 6) Deny (denial of fault or offense) (e.g. I did not cause the accident. You parked your car on my way!)
- 7) Blame (putting blame on the hearer) (e.g. Why didn't you remind me?)
- 8) Health (asking the state of health) (e.g. Are you all right? I can take you to hospital)
- 9) Exclamation (EXL!) (expressing surprise) (e.g. Oh!)
- 10) Request (e.g. Can I use it for two days?)

The responses of 40 subjects and 5 native English speakers were counted and categorized according to the above criteria in the coding tables for each situation. The frequency and percentage of semantic formulas were calculated. In some situations, there were some combinations such as IFID+EXPL, REPR+RESP (see Appendix B for coding).

## 4. Results

As it was stated in the previous chapters, the aim of this study was to investigate the speech act realizations of EFL learners in situations which required apologies. The data were collected through a discourse completion test. The answers of the subjects were calculated and their frequencies were taken in order to make a comparison between the two groups.

### 4.1 The Analysis of Situations

As Table 1 reveals, the most common formula used by both intermediate and advanced level subjects was the use of IFID+EXPL (e.g. I'm sorry, by my daughter was ill; I'm sorry, I had to go to police station). This formula accounted for

60% of the data in both levels. Another common formula was EXPL (Explanation of an account) accounted for 25 % for intermediate level subject data and 30 % for advanced level subject data (e.g. My child was ill). Advanced level subjects used IFID+EXPL.+FORB 10% (e.g. I'm extremely sorry, my car broke down, this won't happen again and intermediate level subjects used IFID + FORB formula 15% (e.g. I'm sorry, I won't be late again). It's interesting to note that subjects in both levels did not use single IFID formula. When the native English speaker data is taken into account, it is seen that 3 subjects used IFID+EXPL, one subject used EXPL and one subject used a totally different category which did not exist in EFL data as IFID+REQUEST (e.g. I'm really sorry but I had an emergency at home. Would it be possible to reschedule for another time?). It is seen that IFID categories accounted for most of the data.

As table 2 reveals, advanced level subjects preferred IFID 5% whereas intermediate level subjects did not prefer IFID. Explanation of an account (EXPL) was used by intermediate level subjects 45 % while advanced level subjects used it 20% (e.g. I have to tidy my room, I couldn't get up).

A promise of forbearance (FORB) was employed by the subjects in both levels, 5 % for intermediate level, 10 % for advanced level. The percentage of EXPL+FORB was same for both groups, 5 %. IFID + EXPL preference of both groups was mostly used by intermediate level subjects (45 %) and advanced level subjects (40 %). Advanced level subjects differed from intermediate level subject in their use of IFID + EXPL + FORB (10 %), IFID + EXPL + RESP. (5 %) and IFID + RESP + FORB (5 %). Intermediate level subjects again did not prefer single IFID.

As for the native speakers of English, 3 subjects preferred IFID+EXPL and 2 subjects used a different category as IFID+EXPL+REQUEST (e.g. I'm sorry, I completely forgot that we were going to meet. Can we re-arrange a night out?).

Situation 3 was about a small car accident. As table 3 reveals, subjects in both groups employed a wide variety of strategies. In terms of IFID only 1 subject in intermediate level used it (5 %). The use of acknowledging responsibility (RESP) and IFID + FORB were same for both groups (5 %). 2 subjects in intermediate level preferred EXPL (10 %), FORB (10 %) and IFID + RESP (10 %). IFID + EXPL accounted for 15 % for intermediate level and 5 % for advanced groups. The subject in intermediate level employed BLAME (35 %). Combinations of IFID were used by advanced subjects. IFID + REPR (35 %), IFID + RESP+ REPR (20 %), IFID + RESP + FORB (5 %). IFID + RESP + REPR was used by 1 intermediate level subject. 2 advanced subjects preferred to use EXPL + REPR and 3 of them used RESP + REPR ( e.g. It's my fault, I'll pay your damage).

The use of BLAME can be said to be an influence from Turkish. 7 intermediate level subjects did not apology but put the blame on the other driver (e.g. That's your fault, shut up!. You parked in a wrong place).

Native English subjects, on the other hand, employed REPR (1 subject), IFID+EXPL (2 subjects), RESP+REPR (1 subject) and IFID+REPR (1 subject). It can be said that advanced level subjects employed the same categories as native speaker subjects.

Situation 4 was about forgetting the book of a classmate. As Table 4 shows, combinations of IFID were higher in both groups (40 % for intermediate subjects, 60 % for advanced subjects). Single IFID formulas were employed by only 2 subjects in advanced group. The use of REPR and IFID + EXPL + BLAME was same for both groups (5 %). EXPL category was preferred only by 7 subjects in intermediate group. IFID + EXPL preference was higher in both groups (25 % for intermediate, 20 % for advanced group). 3 subjects in advanced group used IFID+EXPL + REPR (e.g. I'm sorry, I completely forgot about it, I'll bring it tomorrow). BLAME is used by 3 subjects in intermediate group (e.g. Why didn't you say?). Other formulas were used individually by the subjects in advanced group such as BLAME, IFID+BLAME, EXPL+FORB+BLAME + EXPL and IFID + RESP + REPR.

When the native English speaker data is taken into account, it is seen that 1 subject used RESP, 1 subject used IFID+EXPL+REPR and 3 subjects used IFID+EXPL. The use of the last category is similar to intermediate and advanced subjects' data. They can be said to approximate native English speaker norms.

Situation 5 was about bumping into an old lady accidentally. As Table 5 reveals IFID+EXP and IFID+RESP were the most commonly used categories by the subjects in intermediate level whereas IFID+RESP category was mostly used by the subjects in advanced level (e.g. Sorry, it was my fault). When all the data are taken into account, subjects in advanced level preferred to use a wide variety of strategies, 2 subjects preferred IFID+RESP+HEALTH, 3 subjects preferred IFID+HEALTH+REPR and 2 subjects preferred IFID+EXP+REPR (I'm sorry, I'm very careless. I'll help you pick up your packages).

There were also individual preferences in IFID, IFID+EXPL, IFID+HEALTH, REPR+HEALTH, IFID+RESP, IFID+RESP+REPR and IFID+RESP+REPR+HEALTH categories in advanced level data.

Native English subjects mostly preferred IFID+HEALTH+REPR (3 subjects) category. 1 subject employed a totally new category such as EXL!+IFID+REPR (e.g. Oh, dear. I'm really sorry about that. Is there anything I can do for you?) (see Table 5).

Situation 6 was about accidentally breaking a vase of a friend. As Table 6 reveals, the subjects in intermediate and advanced levels differed in their use of formulas. BLAME, IFID+REPR(20%) and IFID+EXPL+REPR (10%) categories were mostly employed by the subjects in intermediate level whereas IFID+EXPL (25%) and IFID+REPR (40%) were commonly used by the subjects in advanced group. REPR and IFID+REPR+RESP categories were employed by 2 subjects in advanced group. In terms of the usage of IFID one subject per each group used it. The categories such as EXPL, FORB, IFID+EXPL, IFID+RESP, EXPL+REPR, IFID+REPR+RESP and EXCL+IFID+REPR were used by one subject in intermediate group. The use of IFID and combinations of IFID accounted for 70% of the data of intermediate group whereas it accounted for 30% of the data of advanced group.

In situation 7, intermediate level subjects preferred IFID (15%) and IFID+EXP (45%), BLAME (15%) and IFID+HEALTH(15%) mostly. Subjects in advanced group, on the other hand, preferred IFID+EXP (30%), IFID+HEALTH (15%) and IFID+EXPL+HEALTH (30%). It's interesting to note that 3 subjects used BLAME and 1 subject preferred IFID+BLAME categories which were not preferred by the subjects in advanced group. This can be because of the effect of Turkish. Since the situation was about bumping a friend on the corner, 4 subjects in intermediate group put the blame on their friends such as "Why are you running so fast?"

The native English subjects in our study preferred IFID+HEALTH (2 subjects), BLAME (1 subject), IFID+EXPL+HEALTH (1 subject) and EXL!+IFID (1 subject). As the number of native English subjects are few, it is difficult to generalize the results. However, Tunçel's (1995) data can give some insights on native speaker usage. The data of his study revealed that native English speakers preferred IFID, IFID+EXPL, IFID+HEALTH, EXL!+IFID combinations. Our data reveals that the subjects in this study approached native speaker norms in using IFID+EXPL and IFID+HEALTH categories. The subjects in advanced group can be said to approach native speaker norms in terms of using EXL!+IFID+EXPL (5%) and IFID+EXPL+HEALTH (30%) categories.

As Table 8 demonstrates, REPR (10 %), EXPL (15 %), IFID+EXPL (20 %), IFID+REPR (15 %) and EXPL+REPR (20 %) were the categories which were commonly used by the subjects in intermediate group. The formulas used by the subjects in advanced group differed from those used by the subjects in intermediate group. They mostly preferred IFID and combinations of IFID. IFID+EXPL accounted for 10 %, IFID+REPR accounted for 15 %, EXPL+REPR 15 % and EXL!+IFID+EXPL+REPR accounted for 20 % of the data.

All native English subjects in this study preferred different strategies such as IFID+EXPL+REQUEST, IFID+EXPL, EXPL, EXL!+EXPL+REPR (e.g. Oh no, I knew I had forgotten something. I'll give you the book tomorrow) and Questioning + EXPL (e.g. I've been meaning to see you to return your book. Will you be in your office later?).

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to compare and contrast the use of formulas of intermediate and advanced level subjects in situations which required apologies. The data revealed that the apology formulas of these two groups differed according to the situation. The formulas they mostly used were more or less similar in situations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. There were also some individual differences in the data but they were not taken into consideration. In situations 1 and 2 they mostly employed EXPL and IFID+EXPL, in situation 4 they mostly chose IFID+EXPL, in situations 5 and 6 they mostly preferred IFID+REPR, in situation 7 they mostly chose IFID+EXPL and IFID+HEALTH formulas and in situation 8 their choice of IFID+REPR and EXPL+REPR were similar. In situation 3 the formulas they used differed. Subjects in intermediate level preferred to use EXPL, FORB, IFID+EXPL, IFID+RESP and BLAME mostly whereas subjects in advanced level used EXPL+REPR, RESP+REPR, IFID+REPR and IFID+RESP+REPR formulas. Intermediate subjects' use of BLAME in situations 3 and 4 can be explained as a transfer of sociocultural norm into English. This fact was proven to be true in Tunçel's study who pointed out that blaming is a typically Turkish norm where a driver bumped his car and expected to apologize, but put the blame on the other driver who was innocent. Although the formulas they used were similar in situation 4, subjects in intermediate and advanced groups employed other strategies. Intermediate level subjects preferred EXPL and BLAME category mostly whereas advanced level subjects used IFID, IFID+REPR and IFID+EXPL+REPR. These categories were similar to the categories of native English speakers in our data and in Tunçel's data. In situation 8 intermediate and advanced level subjects' use of formulas showed differences. Subjects in intermediate level preferred REPR, EXPL and IFID+EXPL mostly whereas advanced level subjects preferred IFID+EXPL, EXPL+REQUEST and IFID+EXPL+REPR+EXL!. Their use of EXL! category can be explained to approach target language norms because our data and the data of Tunçel revealed that exclamations are widely used by native English speakers.

In terms of IFID usage, advanced level subjects used this category and its combinations more than intermediate level subjects. IFID usage was also found to be prevalent among native English speakers and the overwhelming expression

was “I’m sorry” which expresses regret (Holmes 1990). As Owen (1983; cited in Suszczynska 1999:1059) states the IFIDs are the strategies which are the most conventionalized and routinized, being as it were in the center of the speech act category of apologizing and representing verbal routines or syntactic-semantic formulae.

Although the main concern of this study was to compare and contrast intermediate and advanced level subjects’ apology strategies, these data can be compared with our native English speaker data and native Turkish and English speaker data in Tunçel’s study. Turkish speakers can be said to use apologies more differently than native English speakers. When native English speaker and native Turkish speaker data are taken into account, subjects in advanced level may be said to approach native English speaker norms. However, subjects in intermediate level may be said to employ Turkish norms in their target language usage. It is interesting to note that subjects in both levels, especially intermediate level subjects used some formulas which are not used in their target language in some situations. They developed their own interlanguage formulas.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study suggested that in some situations advanced level subjects approached native speaker norms more than the subjects in intermediate group in the use of apologies. However, in some situations it was seen that the formulas used by subjects in both groups were similar and different from native English data. Their L1 can be said to have an influence on their use of apologies, especially intermediate level subjects transferred native Turkish speaker norms into English such as blaming the other person. It is difficult to generalize the findings because the data were collected from 40 L2 learners. More reliable and valid conclusions might have been drawn had more subjects participated in the study.

The study showed that there are many instances in which L1 cultural norms affected the subjects’ realization of apology speech acts. As Olshtain and Cohen (1983) suggest formal instruction on the use of speech acts by L2 learners speed up the process of learning the target language although acquisition of nativelike production by nonnative speakers may take many years. Teachers can develop students’ metapragmatic ability by exposing them with real life situations through watching videos, role-playing and simulations, i. e. by engaging them in consciousness-raising tasks.

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## Appendix A

### Discourse Completion Test

1. You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call him to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets on the line and asks: Boss : "What happened to you?"
2. You forget a get-together with a friend. You call him to apologize. This is really the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your friend asks over the telephone:  
Friend: "What happened ? "
3. Backing out of a parking place, you run into the side of another car. It was clearly your fault. You dent in the side door slightly. The driver gets out and comes over to you angrily.  
Driver: "Can't you look where you're going? See what you've done!"  
You:
4. You promised to return a textbook to your classmate within a day or two, after xeroxing a chapter. You held onto it for almost two weeks.  
Classmate : I'm really upset about the book because I needed it to prepare for last week's class.  
You:
5. You accidentally bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at an elegant department store, causing her to spill her packages all over the floor. You hurt her leg, too. It's clearly your fault and you want to apologize profusely.  
You:
6. Spending an evening at a friend's apartment, you accidentally break a small vase belonging to her.  
You:
7. Rushing to get to class on time, you run round the corner and bump into one of your fellow students who were waiting there, almost knocking him down.  
You:
8. You have forgotten to return the book you borrowed from your professor. On the staff corridor you come across your professor.  
You:



## Appendix B

### Coding Scheme of Apologies

IFID: Illocutionary Force Indicating Device which includes apology speech acts such as “I’m sorry”, “Excuse me”, “Forgive me”, “I’m terribly sorry”.

REPR: an offer of repair or redress or compensation for the damage (e.g. I’ll pay for your damage, I’ll buy you another one).

EXPL: giving explanation, cause or reason (e.g. I took my daughter to hospital, I completely forgot about meeting).

RESP: acknowledging responsibility for the offense (e.g. It was my fault, What an absent-minded person I am!).

FORB: promising for not repeating the action again (e.g. I’ll never forget to meet you again).

BLAME: putting the blame on the other person (e.g. Why didn’t you remind me?, You parked your car in the middle of the road!).

HEALTH: after an undesired behavior asking the health of the person (e.g. Are you all right? I can take you to hospital).

REQUEST: asking for something politely (e.g. Could you give me the book for a few days?).

EXL!: using words that show surprise (e.g. Oh!, Oops!).

QUESTIONING: asking a question (e.g. Is it possible to use the book for two days?).

Table 1. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 1.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	N	%
IFID	0	0	0	0
REPR	0	0	0	0
EXPL	5	25	6	30
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	0	0	0	0
IFID + EXP	12	60	12	60
IFID + EXP + FORB	0	0	2	10
IFID + FORB	3	15	0	0
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 2. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 2.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	0	0	1	5
REPR	0	0	0	0
EXPL	9	45	4	20
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	1	5	2	10
EXPL + FORB	1	5	1	5
IFID + EXP + FORB	0	0	2	10
IFID + EXPL + RESP	0	0	1	5
IFID + RESP + FORB	0	0	1	5
IFID + EXPL.	9	45	8	40
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 3. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 3.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	1	5	0	0
REPR	1	5	1	5
EXPL	2	10	0	0
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	2	10	0	0
IFID + EXPL	3	15	1	5
EXPL + FORB	1	5	1	5
IFID + RESP	2	10	0	0
BLAME	7	35	0	0
EXPL + REPR	0	0	2	10
IFID + RESP + FORB	0	0	1	5
RESP.+ REPR.	0	0	3	15
IFID + REPR.	0	0	7	35
IFID + RESP. + REPR.	1	5	4	20
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 4. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 4.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	0	0	2	10
REPR	1	5	1	5
EXPL	7	35	0	0
RESP	0	0	1	5
FORB	0	0	0	0
IFID + EXPL	5	25	4	20
IFID + REPR.	1	5	2	10
BLAME	3	15	1	5
IFID + BLAME	0	0	1	5
EXPL + FORB	0	0	1	5
BLAME + EXPL..	0	0	1	5
IFID + EXPL + BLAME	1	5	1	5
IFID + EXPL + REPR	0	0	3	15
IFID + REPR + RESP	0	0	1	5
EXCL + REPR	1	5	0	0
IFID + RESP.	1	5	0	0
EMPTY	0	0	1	5
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 5. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 5.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	1	5	1	5
REPR	1	5	0	0
EXPL	0	0	0	0
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	0	0	0	0
IFID + EXPL	6	30	1	5
IFID + HEALTH	0	0	1	5
REPR+HEALTH	0	0	1	5
RESP+HEALTH	1	5	0	0
IFID+RESP	2	10	1	5
IFID+REPR	6	30	6	30
IFID+RESP+HEALTH	0	0	2	10
IFID + RESP+REPR	0	0	1	5
IFID + HEALTH + RESP	1	5	3	15
IFID + EXPL+RESP.	1	5	2	10
IFID+RESP+REPR+HEALTH	0	0	1	5
EMPTY	1	5	0	0
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 6. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 6.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	1	5	1	5
REPR	2	10	2	10
EXPL	1	5	0	0
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	1	5	0	0
IFID + EXPL	1	5	5	25
BLAME	3	15	0	0
IFID+REPR	4	20	8	40
IFID+RESP	1	5	0	0
EXPL+REPR	1	5	0	0
IFID+EXPL+RESP	3	15	1	5
IFID + REPR+RESP	1	5	2	10
IFID + REPR+FORB	0	0	1	5
EXCL+IFID+REPR	1	5	0	0
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 7. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 7.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	n	%
IFID	3	15	1	5
REPR	0	0	0	0
EXPL	0	0	1	5
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	0	0	0	0
IFID + EXPL	9	45	6	30
BLAME	3	15	0	0
IFID+BLAME	1	5	0	0
IFID+HEALTH	3	15	3	15
HEALTH+EXPL	1	5	0	0
EXL!+IFID+EXPL	0	0	1	5
IFID + EXPL+HEALTH	0	0	6	30
EMPTY	0	0	2	10
TOTAL	20	100	20	100

Table 8. Frequency of the use of semantic formulas in situation 8.

Formulas	Intermediate Level Subjects		Advanced Level Subjects	
	N	%	N	%
IFID	0	0	1	5
REPR	2	10	0	0
EXPL	3	15	1	5
RESP	0	0	0	0
FORB	0	0	0	0
IFID + EXPL	4	20	2	10
BLAME	0	0	1	5
IFID+REPR	3	15	3	15
EXPL+REPR	4	20	3	15
REQUEST	1	5	0	0
EXPL+REQUEST	0	0	2	10
IFID + EXPL+REQUEST	0	0	1	5
IFID + RESP+REPR	1	5	1	5
IFID + EXPL+REPR+EXL!	0	0	4	20
QUESTIONING	1	5	0	0
EMPTY	1	5	1	5
TOTAL	20	100	20	100



## *Beloved as an Oppositional Gaze*

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### **Abstract**

This paper studies the strategy Morrison adopts in *Beloved* to give voice to black Americans long silenced by the dominant white American culture. Instead of being objects passively accepting their aphasia, black Americans become speaking subjects that are able to cast an oppositional gaze to avert the objectifying gaze of white Americans. Further, the novel as a whole becomes a voicing artifact that constitutes an oppositional gaze toward the silencing tendency upheld by the dominant white American culture. In this way, the black Americans manage to work out a strategy of collective coexistence in a white supremacist society.

**Keywords:** Objectifying white gaze, Oppositional gaze, Black subjects

As a writer willing to take on the social responsibilities ordained by a grand American national literature pertaining to the American dream, Morrison sees its incumbent on herself to write about what she believes could “bear witness to a history that is unrecorded, untaught, in mainstream education, and to enlighten our people.” (Wisker, 1993, p.80) Writing, Morrison believes, serves as a literary intervention “against the dominant white (male) structural and formal norms for literary production” to “recognize and rescue those qualities of resistance, excellence, and integrity that were so much a part of our past and so useful to us and to the generations of blacks now growing up” (Century, 1994, p.53). In other words, Morrison intends her writings for a cultural project to retrieve and give voices back to the unspeakable unspoken African American presence long obliterated and unrepresented in literary texts and art within the dominant white American culture. It seeks, in Paula Bennett’s words, “to restore the voices of those who have been ‘disappeared’ (from the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*)”, opening up thereby “the canon to a multiplicity of voices from America’s racially and ethnically excluded minorities and challenge American identity at its core in the dream of Adamic innocence that has historically sustained and justified it.” (Bennett, 1991, pp.1-8) For “writing”, Morrison seems to argue, “is a creative and revolutionary model for change”; it enables expression of cultural experience that could help discover and define a history, and as “representation of some of the possible alternatives and solutions to problems in black Americans’ lives” (Wisker, 1993, p.3). Writing then signifies, for Toni Morrison, both a process of change and a process of “empowerment”. (Wisker, 1993, p. 3) It is most evident in the fact that black Americans long objectified and ostracized by the dominating white society have obtained by this means the opportunity to disperse the dark mist long shadowed and shrouded them, and to voice their experiences of enslaved lives, which would otherwise continue to be channeled into silence.

According to Reinhardt, such a change—namely the change from forced silence into deliberate and conscious voice—is achieved largely as a result of, and in turn would be helpful to, the change within the status of black Americans from object to subject, for under slavery “the slave discursively, is always by definition the object of some subject, ‘an object’ whose own voice is necessarily absent from public discourse.” (Reinhardt, 2002, pp. 81-120) Smith seems to argue here that white gaze objectifies everything it touches. The objectifying tendency of white gaze has already been explicit when Columbus proposed to his master and mistress after he had first put his feet on the new land: “...there are, without doubt, in these countries vast quantities of gold...to gain to our holy faith multitudes of people” (McDowell, 2008)

The multitudes of Native Americans, together with Africans robbed off their native land, were like, for Columbus as for those white people who would later be recognized as the founding fathers of today’s America, gold to be dug from under the ground to add to and multiply their property. “The epistemological foundation of slavery”, Erik Dussere (2001, p333) has argued, “is the ability to see other human beings as property to be bought and exchanged and recorded in the

account book, the transformation of other (non-white) people into monetary value.” Slaves, however, were sometimes regarded by white owners as having less value than animals: they had value only when they were still alive, but when they were dead, unlike horses or other animals which could be hided for their skins after their death, they would bring nothing at all. Of this racialized gaze that reduced black Americans to the same position as or sometimes even lower than animals, Frederick Douglass was clearly aware when he was sent away after his old master Captain Anthony’s death “to be valued with the other property”:

We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. They were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and all were all subjected to the same narrow examination...After the evaluation, then came the division. I have no language to express the high excitement and deep anxiety, which were, felt among us poor slaves during this time. Our fate for life was now to be decided. We had no more voice in that decision than the brutes among which we were ranked. (Douglass, 2001, pp.51-52).

Clearly, black Americans were denigrated under the objectifying gaze held by white Americans to an obscured and silenced status of inferiority, which, according to many, would be a profitable pretext for whites to maintain, and most important of all, to justify their status of subject and superiority. Jennifer Kelly, for example, has made with her own understanding of Franz Fanon’s most influential book *Black Skins White Masks* as a basis a trenchant statement on the importance pertaining to such a racial gaze:

The importance of the gaze is that it allows a dominant group to control the social spaces and social interaction of all groups. Blacks are made visible and invisible at the same time under the gaze. For example, when Black youth are seen it is often with a specific gaze that sees the “troublemaker” “the school skipper” or the “criminal”. Thus they are seen and constrained by a gaze that is intended to control physical and social movements. The purpose of the gaze is that it should subdue those who receive it and make them wish to be invisible. (Fanon, 1994, p.19)

The dominant group referred to here in the case of America is unmistakably the dominant white Americans. It is under the constraints of white gaze that black Americans have lost their voices about their enslaved history in America. It is wiped out legitimately from the mainstream culture.

To break the silence then would mean not ready to yield to or give away under the force of such white gaze. In other words, it is imperative for black Americans not to “receive the gaze”, and to forge up instead, in Kelly’s words, a kind of “oppositional gaze” before they could be able to break the constraints “iron-biting” their tongues.( hooks, 1992, pp.115-31) Oppositional gaze would, under such conditions, help to re-establish black Americans’ status as subject that would ultimately enable them to give voice both to their “high excitement” and to their “deep anxiety”, rather than as silenced objects ranked together with horses and pigs. To gaze is to look back, to talk back against the imposed muteness and invisibility, and to exert the right and power of subject, rather than being simply looked upon and judged as objects of some kinds.

The change of status between object and subject, on the other hand, would help disintegrate the stereotypical patterns of images prescribed by the mainstream discourse. It is due largely to the oppositional gaze exercised by black Americans as subject. Gaze, Lacan believes, is outside the subject as an object of gaze that confirms and sustains the subject’s identity: “what determines me...in the visible, is the gaze that is outside”.( Lacan, 1981, p 106) It is through the identification with the images produced as a result of the gaze outside itself that the subject gains its identity. The subject, Lacan would later say, “is constituted as a ‘given-to-be-seen’, constituted in ‘suspension ’ in a relation to the imagined gaze of the Other.”(Lacan, 1981: 118)

The distortion by or the lack of gaze from outside, if it were to be identified with, would necessarily lead to an unfavorable othered image for the object of gaze to gain its identity as subject. This assumption would prove especially true in the case of black Americans. According to Robert M. Entaman and Andrew Rojecki, authors of *The Black Image in the White Mind*, the dominant white American culture, in spite of its multicultural efforts to include black figures, has long embedded within it “a subtle message of Black skin as taboo”. (Entaman, 2008) Projected as such, black Americans would inevitably view themselves as object untalkable and invisible. About this marginal status, bell hooks suggests that black Americans “look beyond what is presented to them” as what others may call “property” or “taboo”, that they look at these objectified black images “from a critical standpoint she calls ‘an oppositional gaze.’” (Thaggert, 1998, pp. 481-91) It would produce what Lacan believes requisite for the constitution of subject, and would in turn rectify the passivity and lowness of black images under the white gaze.

Obviously, Toni Morrison has realized the importance of oppositional gaze when she made the comment while she was discussing her novels:

There are always concepts of ideals, of racial constraints, which hurts on a level that is just not real. There are some things that can really make you loathe yourself. The gaze of approval is somewhere else...I think questions come out of a different gaze. If there are five white guys judging us, then I have to think about the positive image. (Morrison, 1992)

For Morrison, American ideals emanating from Thomas Jefferson's liberalism about equality raised in *Declaration of Independence* bear strong features of racial inequality. This inconsistency in America's constitution is most (self) evident in the fact that Jefferson kept slaves meanwhile he announced that every man is created equal before the God of law. Even with the racial tolerance demonstrated by the multiculturalism formidably supported by American government cannot, Morrison would point out, escape the same flaw of racial practice such as the "still much ill-gotten gain to reap from rationalizing power grabs and clutches with inferences of inferiority and the ranking of differences." (Morrison, 1992, pp. 63-64)

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison nails down race further as having "become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces more threatening to the body politics than biological 'race' ever was" and it has "assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before." (1992, p.63) As a result, the metaphysical use of race has occupied definitive places in the dominant white American culture, in the national character, and ought to be a major concern of the literary scholarship that tries to know it. Therefore, Morrison sees both as a writer and a literary scholar it her task to "avert the critical (racial) gaze from racial object to the racial subject." (1992, p. 90)

For Morrison, white gaze would render blacks as merely low forms of animals speaking in a manipulated way that bordering on animal groans and howls like Wesley in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, or as vocally deformed capable of no utterance like the black servant in William Faulkner's *A Rose For Emily*, or as servants, Tom in Stow's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for instance, who would take pleasure in serving white owners, etc (1992, pp.69-74). In a word, the dominant white culture has embedded within it a series of negative stereotypical images of black American people that fit easily into Edward Said's category of postcolonial Other, which Said believes would "enable to define itself positively and justify any acts of military or economic aggression it has found advantageous". (Tyson, 199, p.368) It is out of this cultural awareness and acuteness developed since her college years that Morrison is determined to cast a black oppositional gaze in *Beloved* to create from the "shadow" speaking black subjects, putting whites this time in the status of object to be gazed, to put it in her own words, writing "from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served." (Smith and Jones, 2000, p.1065) Or as John A. Powell has stated, "challenging the dominant discourse (of silencing black presence) requires disturbing and de-centering the white gaze." (Powell, 2008)

Ever since its first appearance in 1987, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* has been widely acclaimed as a triumph of literary efforts by African American writers over the silencing tendency still in prominence of the dominant white American culture at a time when multiculturalism has gained the upper hand over other schools of thoughts concerning cultures. "Silence and breaking silence are central issues in the novel's plot, also as vehicles for these arguments", Wisker argues, and it manages to "give voice to the unvoiceable, rescues from silence that which perhaps must be acknowledged". (1993, p.93) Just as the Swedish Academy has noted in 1993 that Morrison is a great American author who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality. Understood as such, Morrison's *Beloved* can be viewed as a cultural maneuver that attempts to "create a space not allowed in the dominant discourse" to make room for the expression of or about "racial Other", and as an oppositional gaze to "valorize what has been denigrated by the dominant society, an attempt to challenge the racing or Othering process." (Powell, 2008)

In *Beloved*, the oppositional gaze committed by literary imagination to a space within literary whiteness to cover the muted experiences of racial Other comes generally from three different directions, namely from black characters, from the narrator, and from Morrison herself as a black woman writer with potent cultural consciousness, with white Americans as its focal point. It would also include the gaze from black audience Morrison has intended for *Beloved* for she believes that her fiction won't work out properly without the participation of readers. As the word "opposition" itself would suggest, there exist inescapably conflicts of gazes that would further complicate the cultural project of addressing black subjectivity "in settings dominated by white culture". (Century, 1994, p.68) The gaze from various directions could, therefore, be further divided into two categories according to the nature of conflicts: the opposition of gazes within the novel, and the oppositional gaze directed towards the culturally objectifying forces engendered by white gaze outside the novel.

Microscopically speaking, *Beloved* depicts a community of black Americans endowed with the ability to think and speak against the stereotypical image of black alogia and ignorance, liberating henceforth blacks from anonymity and silence, and giving back to them simultaneously the right to gaze at the white-dominating American society during the short period of time before and after the abolition of slavery. It is through such a critical gaze that black Americans gain a rational insight into the nature of the dominant white American culture of that historical period, an insight constructive enough to provide the much-needed "mirror image" that would constitute and testify to the subjectivity of black Americans.

The change from object to subject for the black community living around the Blue Stone street under the white gaze begins with and is realized largely as a result of the female protagonist Sethe's courageous fighting against the dominant

society in and after slavery. Gazing at or looking back at white Americans then does not simply mean the exact action of gazing in its narrowest sense. Rather, it refers to whatever measures actively taken by black Americans that can lead to an objective understanding of the dominant culture, which will in turn help to establish a positive black image within that culture. In this regard, *Beloved* centers its main plots around Sethe's deepening comprehension of American society based on her own experiences, and the black gazes converge, therefore, toward a breakdown or deterring of white objectifying gaze that should drive Sethe to take infanticide, the pivotal event from which the novel evolves, as her only choice when challenged by slave-catchers greedy gaze.

Infanticide, the killing of *Beloved* to be exact, has been Sethe's *pis aller* when her children are threatened with the same hurt slavery has wrought upon her. As she later would confess, "it was all I could think of to do" (Morrison, 2000, p.191) and "had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and put her where would be. But my love was tough." (Morrison, 2000, p.200) According to Stamp Paid, such a rough love is not Sethe's symptom of being crazy but her upright effort to confront violently the inhuman system of slavery, by means of which "she was trying to outhurt the hurter." (Morrison, 2000, p.234) On this "eye to eye" strategy of "taking vengeance on white Americans and dispossessing of their property" (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, pp.215-233), Nancy Jessor has made a just remark that "the invasion of 124 by the white people of Sweet Home, who are trying to re-cast Sethe and her children into their role as slaves, results in a paroxysm of violence". (1999, p.331) For Sethe, it turns out clearly a most powerful and effective gaze she could manage, for "by the time she faced him (Schoolteacher), looked him dead in the eye, he took a backward step and realized that there was nothing to claim", (Morrison, 2000, p.164) though it disrupts, Jessor would point out, "neither the racist modes of thinking nor the white supremacist structures of the large society". (1999, p.331)

As a matter of fact, infanticide has been Sethe's "rough choice" out of "no choice" (Morrison, 2000, p.164). Plausibly, its roughness lies in the fact that Sethe flies like an eagle to snatch her children away to the shed where she saws open *Beloved's* throat, and, according to Paul D, the last of Sweet Home men, lies in the fact that Sethe talks "about safety with a handsaw". (Morrison, 2000, p.164) It asserts, nevertheless, her role as subject of violence, re-writing consequently her role as object of violence by victimizing her daughter *Beloved* as property to be claimed by Schoolteacher. On the other hand, it enables Sethe to put *Beloved* "on the other side (Morrison, 2000, p.241)" where whites can no longer reach her, maim her, let alone dirtying her for Sethe believes that whites will "dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself any more". (Morrison, 2000, p.251) Therefore, infanticide in slavery can avert white gaze of objectification, and as a result maintains black Americans' dignity and identity as human beings.

Furthermore, infanticide is not a contingent judgment Sethe has made on the scene but a prompt decision with years of meditation over and fighting against slavery as its basis. In other words, Sethe's choice has its origin in her consciousness developed right through her swaddling days. Slavery not only objectifies blacks as property growing on itself, but also denies them of every right to call themselves human beings, most important of all the right to suck mother milk one enjoys as a baby.

When still in swaddle, Sethe's was not allowed to drink her mother's milk for she was called away to work in the field after a short period of nursing: "She must of nursed two or three weeks.... then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was." Even during the two or three weeks of nursing, Sethe failed to get the full attention and devotion of her mother for when she "woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright, they worked by its light." (Morrison, 2000, p.60) The surrogate mother Nan could not, on the other hand, provide Sethe with enough milk for "the little white babies got it first and I got what was left or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own; to have to fight and holler for it." (Morrison, 2000, p.200) It is so traumatic an experience that years later Sethe would continue to fight back the inhumane white gaze when her daughters' milk was threatened with greedy mossy teeth. This time her looking back appears not in the form of hollering but as a sequence of strenuous effort to defend her daughter's milk. It can be said to start with Sethe's resistance against the stealing of her milk by the two nephews of Schoolteacher. Though not stated directly in the novel whether out of her mouth, in her rememory, or by narrator(s) in the novel, it is most evident in the words Sethe carefully chosen for the accident:

The one I manage to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it; after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, backs behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses. But I wasn't too nasty to cook their food or take of Mrs. Garner. (Morrison, 2000, p. 200)

In choosing "goat" over "cow", Sethe enlivens and envisages for us the scene of her violent reaction to the nephews' offence in sharp contrast to the meekness and servitude expected of cows when they are milked. It also demonstrates Sethe's irritated gaze steered at the objectifying white gaze that is distinct in the fact that she is "held down and her milk stolen from as if she was a cow to nurse the white babies." (Wong, 2008)

Another incident of no less significance in provoking Sethe into infanticide is Schoolteacher's pseudoscientific experiment on categorizing her human characteristics and animal characteristics. It is something so disheartening and disgusting that Sethe feels unable to tell anybody except her ghost daughter returned flesh and bone because she believes it would justify her horrific act:

[...] this is the first time I'm telling it and I'm telling it to you because I might help explain something to you although I know you don't need me to do it. (Morrison, 2000, p.193)

Originally, Sethe "didn't care the measuring string" Schoolteacher wrapped all over her head and thought, "he was a fool", and "the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all". (Morrison, 2000, p.191) But as far her name is "called", Sethe is instinct enough to make a "response", in this case, turning a careful ear to what is being discussed between Schoolteacher and his two nephews. She is right on her way to get the "piece of muslim the bugs and thing wouldn't" get to Beloved when she hears school teacher say, "Which one are you doing?" And one of the boys says, "Sethe." "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on right. And don't forget to line them up." According to Erik Dussere, the putting down on paper of human characteristics and animal characteristics along a line equals the double-entry bookkeeping taken in slavery which "see other human beings as property to be bought and exchanged and recorded in the account book, the transformation of people into monetary values." (Morrison, 2000, p.333)

Of Schoolteacher's motivation to commodify blacks as objects of exchange and exploitation, Sethe is vaguely aware as she bumps into a tree and scratches her scalp when she turns away. On that night, Sethe asks her husband Halle to make sure whether there is any difference between Schoolteacher who talks soft and her previous owner Mr. Garner who has allowed her to choose her husband, and is kind enough to allow Halle to buy his mothers out. Halle's answer that "it don't matter ... what they say is the same, loud or soft" clarifies Sethe's doubt and puts her into alert when Halle moves on that Schoolteacher doesn't want him to work extra anywhere except on Sweet Home because "it don't pay to have my labor somewhere else while te boys is small." (Morrison, 2000, pp.195-7) It dawns upon Sethe that the freedom and happiness before Schoolteacher's arrival turns out to be a sweet lie because as she remembers that her freedom to walk out of Sweet Home is valid only in Mrs. Garner's accompany. What Schoolteacher has done to Sweet Home men is, just as he has claimed, "to put things in order" (Morrison, 2000, p.8), which means returning Sweet Home to what slavery should commonly look like, that is black slaves are low forms of animals like cows to feed greedy white Americans but not to be believed in or given any forms of freedom.

Upon finding out American society under slavery as such, Sethe feels restless and begins to worry over the fate of her three children, as well as the "antelope" dancing in her stomach. (Morrison, 2000, p.34) Hence the plan to flee to freedom where nobody will "list her daughters animal characteristics", "dirty her best things" and "invade her daughter's private parts." (Morrison, 2000, p. 251) The tree-shaping beat Sethe has received later from Schoolteacher for the first time after being found guilty of telling on his two nephews for having stolen her milk disintegrates further the sweet harmony Mr. Garner has built on Sweet Home, and it hardens Sethe's to carry on the plan in spite of its partial failure on the part of Sweet Home men who were ruthlessly chastised either by being "dressed in a collar" like Paul D or being burned alive like Sixo, the latter of which anticipates the infanticide. For Sethe, her running away to where her mother-in-law Baby Suggs lives under such critical conditions is also to provide Beloved she has sent forward with milk: "because only me had your milk...You remember that, don't you; that I did. That when I got here I had milk enough for all?" (Morrison, 2000, p.197)

Taking all these factors into consideration, it is only too natural for Sethe to commit the unbelievable when her plan to freedom should fail her will either to guard for Beloved her milk or to protect from being dirtied by white Americans her dearest part Beloved, as well as her two sons and the baby girl borne on her trip to freedom. Sethe has no alternative but to plan otherwise, or as Sethe would have argued later when Beloved "accused her of leaving her behind and of not being nice to her": "my plan (of killing) was to take us all to the otherside where my own Ma'am is." (Morrison, 2000, p.203) What Beloved complains about is that Sethe is the face that voluntarily jumps into sea to leave her behind. It should also be noted here that Sethe's mother is hanged for her attempt to escape slavery, leaving behind, therefore, Sethe to suffer. So what Sethe is talking about is love for her children and the otherside is obviously the side of death, or "hell" Baby Suggs would argue when she says, "You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side." (Morrison, 2000, p.5) Infanticide is then, to return to what I have argued a little earlier, Sethe's "pis aller" that is both inevitable and reasonable. It can be understood as Sethe's indignant gaze of love shot out against the barren gaze of enrichment held steady by white Americans. At the same time white gaze gradually thaws away, a thinking black subject of benevolence is constituted upon white inhumanity, with the stereotypic black images falling apart. By "thinking subject" I mean Sethe accepts no given views without contemplation, does no things without careful consideration. For example, Schoolteacher's objectifying gaze does not blind Sethe to the fact that the white girl who helps Sethe deliver Denver is an exception to the atrocious whites:

That for every schoolteacher there would be an Amy; that for every pupil there was a Garner, or Bodwin, or even a sheriff, whose touch at her elbow was gentle and who looked away when she nursed. (Morrison, 2000, p.188)

So would Sethe think. At another point, Sethe ponders over in her mind that pilfering would prove better than accepting white discrimination and black defiance to be encountered if she were to wait for the service "with the others till every white in Ohio was served before the keeper turned to the cluster of Negro faces looking through a hole in his back



door.”(Morrison, 2000, p.189)

For Baby Suggs, white gaze in Carolina has “busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongued”, changing her as a result into” a real bargain for Mr. Garner, who took them both to Kentucky to a farm he called Sweet Home”, a farm which is worthy of its name in the fact that its owner never “pushed, hit or called her mean names” and have allowed Halle to bought her out of slavery. So Baby Suggs holds an ambivalent view toward white Americans. In the beginning, Suggs preaches in the Clearing that laughing, shouting, crying, and dancing are suitable means to look back at white Americans and to recover freed slaves from their bruised bodies. “Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart” collapse after the infanticide, for she realizes that “the heart that pumped out love, the mouth that spoke the word, didn’t count and they (slavecatchers) came in her yard anyway”. (Morrison, 1987:180) Due to her failure of such, Baby Suggs transfers her gaze to colors and recoils thereafter deeper to her original belief that “there is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks” and “there was no defence—they could prowl at will, change far from what real humans did.”(Morrison, 2000, p.244)

It is an insight Stamp Paid and Paul D won’t disagree about, but unlike Suggs, both of them fight consistently against the white gaze. In the case of Stamp Paid, he breaks the neck of her wife to stop her from being further soiled by her slave owner. After that, he changes his name from Joshua into this present name and comes to Cincinnati where he ferries and hides runaways, and has won the respect from the black community. According to Paul D, Schoolteacher tries to re-educate and re-order Sweet Home boys, and has broken “into children what Garner had raised into men”. Garner calls and announces them men and often gets beaten with bruises all over by his neighbors for this, but they are men” only on Sweet Home, and by his leave.”(210) The slavery maintained by Mr. Garner, as Paul D calls it, is a “wonderful lie, dismissing Halle’s and Baby Suggs’ life before Sweet Home as bad luck.”(Morrison, 2000, p.221) Due to his realization of this kind, Paul D plans to escape slavery by underground train, but is caught by Schoolteacher. He has also attempted to kill his new owner Schoolteacher has got for him. When chained with other prisoners for that unfulfilled murdering attempt, Paul D sings to challenge white gaze as Sixo does.

Singing, Paul D remembers, has been Sixo’s successful way to challenge the objectifying gaze of white Americans. When Sixo tries to defend himself in the language whites has claimed for themselves that his eating of the shoat is not an act of theft but an act of improving Schoolteacher’s property, “Schoolteacher beats him anyway to show that definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined.”(190) So he goes to the woods to dance and sing to “keep his blood line open”, saying that there is no future in speaking English. When he is caught with other Sweet Home slaves for their bold transgression of running away, Sixo “grabs the mouth of the nearest point rifle” and “begins to sing”. (Morrison, 2000, p.225) The white men find it difficult to shoot Sixo for singing locates his personhood, quite in opposition to the animals they see with their objectifying gaze. Only after Sixo “is through with his song” do the white men see a slave and proceed to burn him alive. (Morrison, 2000, p.226)

Likewise, the rest of the black characters in *Beloved* have cast their gaze of sorts at white Americans and each of them have obtained their own insight into the nature of the dominant white American society. A fact note-worthy is that the gaze at and insight into white society might change with persons and times as is shown in the case of Baby Suggs. Just take Denver for another example, though not as bold as her mother Sethe, she has experienced a change from fearing and disgusting of white gaze to voluntarily meeting with white gaze, her comprehension of white society takes on, accordingly, a similar characteristic of change from childish prejudice into adult maturity. When Paul D steps in 124 after eighteen years of trip, Denver is “suddenly hot and shy.” She remembers then “it has been a long time since anybody good-willed whitewoman...sat at their table, their sympathetic voices called liar by the revulsion in their eyes.” (Morrison, 2000, p.12) The traces of repulsion and arrogance Denver catches in the white gaze, together with her shyness at the stranger Paul D, demonstrates with certainty her childhood hatred and disgust she felt for white Americans for their hypocrisy and prejudice. Her hatred for white gaze, however, is mingled with her anxiety for the gaze from Emy for she is only interested in the part of story Sethe tells about her birth. Her effort to avert white gaze looses when she is forced to walk out 124 to seek work from white people after years of seclusion from outside hastened by Nelson Lord when he questions Denver about her mother’s being jailed for infanticide. But she still bears in her mind the fact that white Americans like Schoolteacher, or the father and son who have kept Ella—another important black character not to be overlooked—for their pleasure, “could take your whole self for anything that came to mind.”(Morrison, 2000, p.251) When Paul D asks her “if they treated her all right over there, she said more than all right. Miss Bodwin taught her stuff. ‘She says I might go to Oberlin. She’s experimenting on me.’”(Morrison, 2000, p.267) By “more than” Denver means that she has achieved her judgment, or in her own words, “I have my own *opinion*”, of white Americans. (252) It is clear that Denver is moving also as a thinking subject on her way to a more comprehensive and rightful gaze at them whites.

The images of white American under black gaze in *Beloved* fall easily into three groups: the cruel like Schoolteacher, and the ones who kept Ella; the open-minded like the Garners; and the good-willed like the Bodwins, and the kind Amy. It is a classification that in no way differs greatly from the one Jane Davis has made in her thought-provoking

monograph *The White Image in the Black Mind: A Study of African American Literature*. Davis believes that white images in the black imagination include such stereotypes as the overt bigot, the hypocrite, the liberal, and the good-hearted weakling. (Davis, 200, p.4) Obviously, Schoolteacher belongs to the type of overt bigot, whereas, the Garners can be called liberals for their permission to let Halle buy out his mother. The Bodwins, as Sethe and Denver see, are the good-hearted abolitionists as is clearly stated in the novel. (Morrison, 2000, p.190) But this kind of categorization, as it seems, is a little too limited. As we shall see, Schoolteacher's cruelty cannot overshadow his soft-talking manner and scientific experiment. It is in this sense that we can also call Schoolteacher a hypocrite. So the image of Americans under black gaze take on different forms, rather than being thrown into the same low status, as they will do with black Americans.

Macroscopically speaking, *Beloved* has been, as I have previously argued, a literary effort made both by Toni Morrison as the imaginative narrator outside the novel and simultaneously by the anonymous omniscient narrator inside the novel to break the silence imposed upon black Americans by literary whiteness.

As is generally agreed upon, *Beloved* was inspired by the true story of a black American slave woman, Margaret Garner who, when confronted with the slave masters, killed her baby after the infamous 1870s Fugitive Slave Act, in order to save the child from the slavery she had managed to escape. But such a story, though had caught enough white attention to be carried in the newspaper, is missing nevertheless from American history. The newspaper clipping that carries the news was only bumped into when Morrison was editing *The Black Book*, a scrapbook engaging in documenting what has been excluded from history by the mainstream culture. (Century, 1994, pp.73-81) Instead of documenting what really has happened in that book, Morrison has saved it for a literary invention about "these anonymous people called slaves. What they do to keep on, how they make a life, what they're willing to risk, however long it lasts, in order to relate to one another." (Century, 1994, p.78)

When it finally came out as a novel entitled *Beloved* 1987, *London Times* reviewer Nicholas Shakespeare likened the book to the "first singing of a people hardened by their suffering, people who have been hanged and whipped and mortgaged at the hands of [white people]...From Toni Morrison's pen it is a sound that breaks the back of words, making *Beloved* a great novel." (Century, 1994, p.78) The "back" that Shakespeare is keen on refers to the dominant white American culture that privileges some things as being center while denigrates other things as being margin or Other. The "words", on the other hand, refer to the standard white American English "that becomes the medium through which", Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin all would say, "a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established." (1998, p.7) What has been really constituted through that medium is a reality of cultural hegemony that engenders and enforces a black absence or black Other in American history. The silencing of black sounds, especially those about white Americans, has been regarded by many a defensive mechanism to maintain white Americans "desire for supremacy". The denial of the representation of white people in the black mind, according to Kenneth B. Clark, shields whites from looking into the "disagreeable mirror," to use James Baldwin's phrase, held up by blacks to whites. (Davis, 2000, pp.13-14)

The back of the words, namely the essence of white American culture is meticulously presented by Morrison and the narrator inside the novel through Paul D's perception of the sine qua non to be a piece of news:

A whip of fear broke through the heart chambers as soon as you saw a Negro's face in a paper since the face was not there because the person had a healthy baby, or outran a street mob. Nor was it there because the person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could hardly qualify news in a newspaper. It would have to be something out of ordinary---something white people would find interesting, truly different, worth a few minutes of teeth sucking if not gasps. And it must have been hard to find news about Negroes worth the breath catch of a white citizen of Cincinnati. (Morrison, 2000, p.155)

It is clear then that white American culture tries every means to construct a reality clear of black presence. The only things that will arouse sufficient attention are the ones that white Americans think recreational, amusing, and ridiculous, thus throwing black Americans into a position of clown, less human as white Americans, or to put it otherwise, blacks are "often considered to be as lowly as animals". (Andriamirado, 2008) To break the back of the words is to break down the accepted black images and ideologies embodied within that cultural reality as is evident in the canonical American literary works, and to rescue in the meantime, Morrison would argue, what has been left out to "bear witness to a history unrecorded in the mainstream history" for the sake of a comprehensive cognition of America as a nation. So far as this is concerned, *Beloved* has been so successful that John Leonard, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, called it "a masterwork", belonging "on the highest shelf of American literature.... Without *Beloved* our imagination of the nation's self has a hole in it big enough to die from." (qtd. Century, 1993, p.78) It is only in this regard that *Beloved* as a voicing artifact constitutes an oppositional gaze toward the silencing tendency upheld by the dominant white American culture.

Black gazes from both inside and outside in *Beloved*, as I have pointed out, are not thrust out as an attempt for "cognitive distortions" of white Americans as they will do with black Americans. (Davis, 2000, p.3) Nor are they cast out as an effort to constitute stereotypical white images. Rather, the examination of whiteness by black characters both

fictional and factual is oriented towards what bell hooks have outlined at the outset of “Representations of Whiteness”:

Although there has never been any official body of black people in the United States who have gathered as anthropologists and/or ethnographers whose central projects is the study of whiteness, black folks have, from slavery on, shared with one another “special” knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white. ... [I]t's purpose was to help black folks cope and survive in a white supremacist society. (Morrison, 2000, p.31)

In casting such an oppositional gaze at the dominant white American society, *Beloved* manages to open up a space for black Americans to recuperate as active subjects their experiences previously blocked from the mainstream history. It offers at the same time an opportunity for black Americans to work out a strategy of collective coexistence as indicated by Sethe's recovery from her traumatic past with the help of the other members of the black community.

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## World Englishes, English as an International Language and Applied Linguistics

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### Abstract

The paper discusses World Englishes (WEs) in relation to English as an International Language (EIL) and Applied Linguistics. Taking into account Kachru's interesting but at the same time controversial debate about the status of English in its varieties, which are commonly called WEs and the opposing ideas presented by Quirk, it is aimed to present an overview of these discussions, together with some examples. Kachru's three concentric circles, the Interlanguage theory, Standard English and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) were paid special attention while touching upon the controversial debates on World Englishes. Moreover, following these discussions on WEs, EIL and Applied Linguistics, some answers were provided regarding the questions on teaching and teacher education, seeing that the uses of English internationally are not just related to the Expanding Circle, but also they include native speakers as well as members of the Outer Circle.

**Keywords:** World Englishes, Applied Linguistics, Interlanguage Theory, Standard English

### 1. Introduction

The rapid spread of English as a language of communication has no doubt stimulated interesting but at the same time controversial debate about the status of English in its varieties, which are commonly called World Englishes (Kachru, 1985). Kachru (1990), in his paper entitled "World Englishes and Applied linguistics" discusses,

the limitations of traditional applied linguistics perspectives on world Englishes, suggesting that these had been skewed by the ethnocentrism of inner-circle practitioners, reliance on interlanguage and error analysis frameworks, and misconceptions concerning the sociolinguistic realities of multilingual outer-circle societies (as cited in Bolton, 2004, p. 389).

According to Kachru (1985), English has been indigenized in India as well as other countries including Singapore, Nigeria, which are referred to outer circles. Throughout the process, Kachru and other scholars, especially Quirk (1990), joined the debate over these Englishes. Kachru (1985) presented arguments against Interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972) and specifically the main components of this theory: Errors, fossilization, and socio-cultural contexts.

Before outlining the arguments and presenting another view regarding World Englishes and Applied Linguistics, it will be useful to go over Kachru's (1997) three concentric circles, a definition of World Englishes and the concept of interlanguage. Regarding the meaning(s) of World Englishes, Bolton presents several interpretations such as an umbrella term covering all varieties of Englishes, new Englishes in countries such as Africa and Asia. However, the term *World Englishes* will be used, as Jenkins (2006) proposed, to cover new Englishes in Africa and Asia, which are considered as Outer Circle by Kachru.

Kachru (1997) proposed three circles (Figure-1) to divide English-using world. While doing this, he focused on the historical context of English, the status of the language and the functions in various regions. According to Kachru, the Inner Circle includes the Native English-speaking countries such as England, USA and Canada. The Outer Circle consists of the former colonies such as India, Africa and Nigeria and finally Expanding Circle includes countries such as China, Japan and Turkey, which are affected by Western and where English is becoming an important language in business, science, technology and education. Kachru's main arguments are more related to Outer Circle and against IL theory. According to IL theory, (Selinker, 1972, 1992), second language learners' competence is based on an interlanguage continuum between their first (L1) and their second (L2) language. If their output is different from Standard English (American or British), it is regarded as an error (interference of L1 mainly) and if they continue producing errors (fixing), this is known as fossilization. In 1992, Selinker reproduced his IL theory and particularly applied fossilization to World Englishes context, which renewed the challenge to the theory by scholars such as Kachru and Quirk.

## 2. World Englishes Debate

World Englishes and Standard English was originally hotly debated by Quirk (1985, 1990) and Kachru (1985, 1991). Quirk (1990), in his discussion of Englishes in various contexts especially in the Outer-Circle countries, suggested that these varieties of English be just interference varieties and teachers of English were advised to focus on native norms and native like performance and stressed the need to uphold one common standard in the use of English not only in the Inner Circle countries but also in others. He also pointed out that a common standard of use for written as well as spoken English was necessary to regulate the use of English in different contexts. He suggested this possibly for the fear that the language (English) would divide up into unintelligible varieties or different forms, which would result in its losing the function of international communication. In response to him, Kachru (1985), on the other hand, claimed that such norms as speech acts and registers were irrelevant to the sociolinguistic reality in which members of the Outer Circle use English. However, he did not mention that what he said might also be relevant to English as a Lingua Franca and the use of English in the Expanding Circle. Kachru also believed that acknowledging a variety of norms would not lead to a lack of intelligibility among different users of English and in a way, Widdowson (1994) supported Kachru saying that many bilingual users of English acquire the language in educational contexts, which put emphasis on a particular standard and tend to ensure some unifying forms. Kachru (1985) suggested challenging traditional notions of standardization and models as they tend to be related to only Inner-Circle users:

... the global diffusion of English has taken an interesting turn: the native speakers of this language seem to have lost the exclusive prerogative to control its standardization; in fact, if current statistics are any indication, they have become a minority. This sociolinguistic fact must be accepted and its implication recognized. What we need now are new paradigms and perspectives for linguistics and pedagogical research and for understanding the linguistic creativity in multilingual situations across cultures. (p. 30)

Widdowson (1994) agreed with the Kachru's statement against Standard English and the ownership, maintaining that native speakers cannot claim ownership of English:

How English develops in the world is no business whatsoever of native speakers in England, the United States, or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgment. They are irrelevant. The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. To grant such custody of the language is necessarily to arrest its development and so undermine its international status. It is a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication. But the point is that it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it. (p. 385)

In addition to the standardization, Kachru's main argument against IL theory was that Outer Circle English speakers were not trying to identify with Inner Circle speakers or native speakers. That is, they were not interested in the norms of English based in Inner Circle such as requesting and complaining. Thus, he criticized the attempts to label the Englishes in the Outer Circle as deviant or deficient and fossilized since these views were not considering the local Englishes (Outer Circle) and the sociocultural context. He was also against the label 'errors' since again utterances which are considered as errors may not apply to the local Englishes as they may be perfectly acceptable. Let us look at some examples of English in Outer Circle (Bhatt, 2005, pp. 39-40):

- a) You have taken my book, isn't it?
- b) You are soon going home, isn't it?

These are unindifferentiated tag questions in Indian English. In these examples, it can be seen that the meaning of tag is not the meaning of the main proposition, but rather social meaning. These two examples show how the linguistic form is constrained by cultural constraints of politeness. These tags (*isn't it*) as used in Indian English are governed by politeness principle of nonimposition. In standard American or British English, tag questions are formed by inserting a copy of the subject (pronominal) after an appropriate modal auxiliary. If we again consider the examples given above, these tag questions will be as the following:

- a) You have taken my book, haven't you?
- b) You are soon going home, aren't you?

The influence of culture on grammatical rules in Indian English can also be seen in the use of 'May'. Consider the following example (Bhatt, p. 41):

\*These mistakes may please be corrected.

Here, 'May' is used to express obligation politely, whereas in Standard English, it will be used as 'These mistakes must be corrected' or 'these mistakes are to be corrected'. While the examples from Standard English are unacceptable in Indian English since they are positional in their social context, a native speaker can see them as what they should be definitely due to grammar or the norms, which Kachru rejects, in local context. Although the use of tags and the modal

auxiliary 'May' in Indian English seem odd and can be regarded as the violation/deviation of rules, it can be agreed that they are acceptable in its own context rather than being regarded as signs of fossilization. However, if these forms are used in international context where English is used as a means of communication by members of different cultures, there may be some communication breakdowns or misunderstandings.

Considering the arguments Kachru proposed, the traditional applied linguistics perspectives seem to fail to consider multilingual context. However, this does not mean that *IL* and *errors* do not contribute to language acquisition. Consider an imaginary situation in which a person who has moved to an Outer Circle country (India) and utters a sentence 'You must come early tomorrow' in his/her attempts to learn Indian English, which is positional and in a way unacceptable in the local context. What would Kachru say about his/her utterance? This can be considered a simple logic, but Kachru would possibly talk about IL or a kind of error that does not consider the social context. Alternatively, would he say that everyone has his/her own way of saying and that person is right since he does not want to use 'a norm of Indian English'? Kachru talks about the ethnocentrism of Inner Circle practitioners, but he may also be promoting 'nationalism' as Pennycook (1994) suggested. Moreover, instead of benefiting from WEs discussion, local people might also suffer as their use of English, as seen in the examples, may mark them off as low proficient users or even be stigmatized in the English L1 communities (Luk & Lin, 2006).

What can applied linguistics do regarding these discussions? The situation cannot be simply ignored. Especially from second language acquisition perspective, future research should go over the traditional approaches and make necessary changes/additions or at least be aware of the forms that learners produce not only in the Outer Circle but also in the Expanding Circle, which reflect the sociolinguistic reality of their English use.

### 3. World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca and Teacher Education

World Englishes debate lead to related issues such as English as a lingua Franca and teaching World Englishes and teacher education. The uses of English internationally are not just related to the Expanding Circle, but also it includes native speakers as well as members of the Outer Circle English. English is currently seen the best option for communication among people from different language backgrounds, thereby being labeled as 'English as an International Language (EIL)' or 'English as a Lingua Franca'. Scholar such as Jenkins (2006, 2000) and Seidlhofer (2004, 2002) have made significant contributions to this issue with their valuable articles and books, notably Jenkin's 'The phonology of English as an International language' (2000) and Seidlhofer's (2002) corpus the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). Both analyzed the use of ELF speakers from a variety of different backgrounds. Jenkins provided which pronunciation errors led to intelligibility problems and which did not. Seidlhofer focused on ELF lexicogrammar and tried to find out which items were used frequently, but differently with respect to native speakers. Both scholars paid specific attention to uses that do not cause communication problems. This was an attempt to reflect the sociolinguistic reality of the largest group – Expanding Circle, especially. Although Jenkins and Seidlhofer did not aim to reflect ELF as a World English, some World Englishes scholars mistook ELF for that function. What takes notable attention about their studies is that the burden- being aware of World Englishes and Standard English) is not just on the Expanding Circle, but also on Outer Circle and notably Inner Circle.

The discussion of World Englishes have also arisen questions about teaching and teacher education. One could ask what kind of English or Which English should be taught in the Expanding Circle. If we are teaching Turkish students to use English well in an educational institution in the USA, the best answer will be American English, but if we have the aim of allowing our students to communicate across cultures, then we should teach English so that they will be able to understand/tolerate many accent and varieties through exposure. Awareness should be created and cross-cultural communication strategies should be studied. It is of utmost importance for teachers to develop a greater tolerance of differences and adjust their expectations according to the settings. They should be informed about the varieties and provided with the opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in all three circles. However, what matters most seems to be the intelligibility of the uses of English in different countries or regions, not just in national boundaries. This can be achieved through the publishers in all over the world, providing World Englishes and ELF perspectives in their books, materials, and more importantly in their practices of language testing and assessment.

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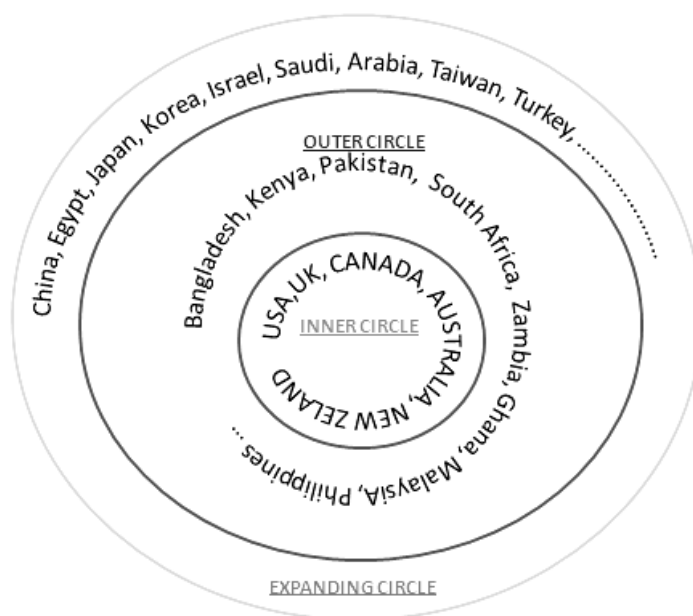


Figure 1. Concentric circle model (Adapted from Kachru (1997))





## The Inter-rater Reliability in Scoring Composition

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### Abstract

This paper makes a study of the rater reliability in scoring composition in the test of English as a foreign language (EFL) and focuses on the inter-rater reliability as well as several interactions between raters and the other facets involved (that is examinees, rating criteria and rating methods). Results showed that raters were fairly consistent in their overall ratings. This finding has the great implications for controlling and assuring the quality of the rater-mediated assessment system.

**Keywords:** Inter-rater reliability, Scoring composition, Rating criteria

For a long term, the experts in language testing are always in dispute about whether the subjective items (for example composition) should be utilized in the crucial tests and the chief objection to the inclusion of the composition as part of any test is generally on grounds of unreliability. Considerable research in the past has shown that unreliable examiners are both in their own inconsistency (intra-rater reliability) and in their failure to agree with colleagues (inter-rater reliability) on the relative merits of rating scale, severity and leniency and so on. In spite of all such demonstrations of unreliability, composition is still widely used in various kinds of language tests merely because it can provide not only a high motivation for writing, but also an excellent backwash effect on teaching. Therefore, if a more reliable means of scoring the composition can be used, sampling a student's language skills by writing will appear a far more valid way than any other objective items.

In this paper the author may concentrate on how to establish high rater reliability, especially the inter-rater reliability in scoring composition. The study is based on a practical research: asking eight examiners to score a composition by using the two different methods (holistic scoring and analytic scoring).

### 1. The Related Terms

#### 1.1 Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which test scores are consistent: if candidates took the test again after taking it today, would they get the same result. There are several ways of measuring the reliability of "objective" tests (test-retest, parallel form, split-half, KR20, KR21, etc.). The reliability of subjective tests is measured by calculating the reliability of the marking; this is done by several ways (inter-rater reliability, intra-rater reliability, etc.)

#### 1.2 Inter-rater reliability

Inter-rater reliability refers to the degree of similarity between different examiners: can two or more examiners, without influencing one another, give the same marks to the same set of scripts (contrast with intra-rater reliability).

#### 1.3 Holistic scoring

Holistic scoring is a type of rating where examiners are asked not to pay too much attention to any one aspect of a candidate's performance, but rather to judge general writing ability rather than to make separate judgement about a candidate's organization, grammar, spelling, etc.

#### 1.4 Analytic scoring

Analytic scoring is a type of rating scale where a candidate's performance (for example in writing) is analyzed in terms of various components (for example organization, grammar, spelling, etc.) and descriptions are given at different levels for each component.

### 2. The Methods Used to Obtain High Inter-rater Reliability

#### 2.1 The Importance of High Inter-rater Reliability

In common sense, it would not be realistic to expect all examiners to match the "standard" all the time because if the marking of a test is not valid and reliable, then all of the other work undertaken earlier to construct a "quality" instrument will have been a waster of time. No matter how well specifications of a test reflect the goals of the institution or how much care has been taken in the designing and protesting of items, all the effort will have been in vain if the test

users cannot have faith in the marks that examiners give to the candidates.

In one word, the poor inter rater consistency will directly reduce the reliability and the validity of the test to a very large degree.

## *2.2 How to Establish High Inter-rater Reliability*

### *2.2.1 Setting the Standard*

In a test with a large number of examinees, it is impossible for all the examiners to have an equal say in determining scoring policy. This description assumes that there is a “Chief Examiner (CE)”, who, either alone or with a small group of colleagues, setting the standards for marking and passes these onto the examinees who may mark centrally or individually in their homes.

### *2.2.2 Training the Scorers*

The scoring of compositions shouldn't be assigned to anyone who has not learned to score accurately compositions from past administrations. After each administration, patterns of scoring should be analyzed. The individuals whose scorings deviate markedly and inconsistently from the norm should not be used again.

### *2.2.3 Identifying Candidates by Number, Not Name*

Scorers inevitably have expectations of candidates that they know, this will affect the way that they score, especially in subjective marking. Studies have shown that even where the candidates are unknown to the scorers, the name on scripts will make a significant difference to the scores given. For example, a scorer may be influenced by the gender or nationality of a name into making predictions which can affect the score given. The identification of the candidates only by number will reduce such effects.

### *2.2.4 Setting the Specific Standards before the “Real Scoring”*

So after the test has been administered, the CE should read quickly through as many scripts as possible to extract scripts which represent “adequate” and “inadequate” performances, as well as scripts which present problems which examiners are often faced with but which are rarely described in rating scales: bad handwriting, excessively short or long responses, responses which indicate that the candidates misunderstood the task etc.

The next step is for CE to form a standardizing committee to try out the rating scale on these scripts and to set and record the standards. All of the marking members should be given copies of the scripts selected by the CE, in random order, and each member should mark all of these scripts before the committee meets to set standards.

### *2.2.5 Sampling by the Chief Examiner or Team Leader*

Each examiner is expected to make a certain number of scripts on the first day of marking. The team leader collects a percentage of marked scripts from the examiners (often 10-20%), and reads through them again in order to give an independent mark (that is called “blind marking”) to find whether the examiners marking properly. The process of sampling should be continued throughout the marking period in order to narrow the differences in examinees.

### *2.2.6 Using “reliability scripts”*

The second method of monitoring marking is to ask each examiner independently to mark the same packet of “the reliability scripts” which have been marked by the standardizing committee earlier. The reliability exercise should take place after the examiners have begun marking “for real”, but early enough in the marking period for changes to be made to scripts which may already have been marked incorrectly by unreliable examiners. The afternoon of the first day of marking or the second morning would be suitable times.

### *2.2.7 Routine double marking*

The third way of monitoring examiners and ensuring that their marks are reliable is to require routine double marking for every part of the exam that requires a subjective judgement. This means that every composition should be marked by two different examiners, each working independently. The mark that the candidate receives for a piece of writing is the mean of the marks given by the two examiners.

## **3. The Two Ways of Scoring Composition**

So far in part II, we have been concerned to improve the inter-rater reliability. Now we'd like to turn to the methods of scoring.

Composition may be scored according to two different criteria: the holistic scoring and the analytic scoring.

### *3.1 Holistic Scoring*

Holistic scoring is a type of rating where examiners are asked not to pay too much attention to any one aspect of a candidate's performance, but rather to judge general writing ability rather than to make separate judgement about a candidate's organization, grammar, spelling, etc. This kind of scoring has the advantage of being very rapid.

Experienced scorers can judge a one-page of writing in just several minutes or even less. As it is possible for each composition to appear just to a certain rater but not others, the examiner's mark may be a highly subjective one. However, if assessment is based on several judgements, the net result is far more reliable than a mark based on a single judgement.

Because the inherent unreliability in holistic marking of compositions, it is essential to combine a banding system, or, at least, a brief description of the various grades of achievement expected to be attained by the examinees. An example of a holistic scale is given in the coming figure.

Insert Figure 1 Here

### 3.2 Analytic scoring

Since most teachers have little opportunity to enlist the services of two or three colleagues in marking compositions, the analytic method--analytic scoring--is recommended for such purposes.

Analytic scoring is a type of rating scale where a candidate's performance (for example in writing) is analyzed in terms of various components (for example organization, grammar, spelling, etc.) and descriptions are given at different levels for each component (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 Here

These rating criteria (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are only two of many that are available in EFL testing. The number of points on the scale and the number of components that are to be analyzed will vary, given the distinct demands that different writing tasks can place on candidates. The challenge to examiners is to understand the principles behind the particular rating scales they must work with, and to be able to interpret their descriptors consistently.

## 4. Give a Composition for Eight Examiners to Score

In order to make the study, the author of this paper chose one composition from the examinees' works and eight examiners to mark the composition individually. The raters who marked the examinee's writing were all experienced teachers and specialists in the field of English as a foreign language. Each rater was licensed upon fulfillment of strict selection criteria. As mentioned previously, raters were systematically trained and monitored as to compliance with scoring guidelines. Ratings of examinee's essay were carried out according to the two main marking methods mentioned previously: holistic marking method and the analytic marking method. The analytic marking method includes a detailed catalogue of performance aspects: content, organization, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling etc. (for the detailed information, please consult Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Part3).

The coming table shows us the scores given by the eight examiners, including holistic marking scores and the sum scores of each candidate according to the analytic scales.

Insert Table 1 Here

## 5. Data Analysis

And then the author analyzes the scores with the help of the statistical software SPSS and gets the statistic data (presenting below).

M1 is the marks given by holistic scoring

Mean of M1=12.3750, range =5, SD=1.50594, SD error mean=.53243

M2 is the marks given by analytic scoring

Mean of M2=14.5000, range=5, SD=2.07020, SD error mean=.73193

The correlation between M1 and M2 is .802; significance level .017 (consulting Table2 and Table3).

F of M1 is 1.188 and F of M2 1.705, both of them are less than df, 5 and 4 individually (consulting Table4 and Table 5) so we can get the conclusion that the differences among the eight examiners are not obvious.

Insert Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 Here

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper the author first showed the importance of high inter-rater reliability in EFL testing and told us how to gain the high inter-rater reliability (there are seven ways mentioned in this paper). Then the author tried to determine whether the raters are consistent in scoring the subjective items (taking composition as an example) by using the different scoring methods (holistic scoring and analytic scoring). At the end of the paper the author, by analyzing the data, got the conclusion that raters were fairly consistent in their overall ratings (the correlation is .802, significance level is .017) and the marks given by analytic scoring are usually a little higher than that of holistic scoring (mean of M1 is 2.1250 less than mean of M2). This finding has the great implications for controlling and assuring the quality of the rater-mediated assessment system.

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Table 1. The Marks Given by the Teachers

	Holistic Scoring Marks(M1)	Analytic scoring marks							Total Marks (M2)
		Content	Organization	Cohesion	vocabulary	Grammar	Punctuation	Spelling	
Teacher1	15	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	17
Teacher2	13	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	17
Teacher 3	10	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	12
Teacher 4	12	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	15
Teacher 5	13	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	16
Teacher 6	11	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	13
Teacher 7	13	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	14
Teacher 8	12	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	12

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics

	N	Minimum	maximum	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
.M1	8	10	15	5	12.3750	1.50594	.53243
M2	8	12	17	5	14.5000	2.07020	.73193

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	M1 and M2	8	.802	.017

Table 4. ANOVA (M1)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.875	5	2.375	1.188	.516
Within Groups	4.000	2	2.000		
Total	15.875	7			

Table 5. ANOVA (M2)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	20.833	4	5.208	1.705	.345
Within Groups	9.167	3	3.056		
Total	30.000	7			

18-20	Excellent	Natural English with minimal errors and complete realization of the task set
16-17	Very good	More than a collection of simple sentences, with good vocabulary and structures. Some non-basic errors.
12-15	Good	Simple but accurate realization of the task set with sufficient naturalness of English and not many errors.
8-11	Pass	Reasonably correct but awkward and non-communicating or fair and natural treatment of subject, with some serious errors.
5-7	Weak	Original vocabulary and grammar both inadequate to the subject.
0--4	Very poor	Incoherent. Errors show lack of basic knowledge of English.

Figure 1. A Sample Holistic Scale

From: UCLES International Examinations in English as a Foreign Language General Handbook, 1987

**Relevance and Adequacy of content**

0. The answer bears almost no relation to the task set. Totally inadequate answer.
1. Answer of limited relevance to the task set. Possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition.
2. For the most part answers the task set, though there may be some gaps or redundant information.
3. Relevant and adequate answer to the task set.

**Compositional Organization**

0. No apparent organization of content.
1. Very little organization of content. Underlying structures not sufficiently apparent.
2. Some organization skills in evidence but not adequately controlled.
3. Overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organization skills adequately controlled.

**Cohesion**

0. Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing is so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended communication is virtually impossible.
1. Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication.
2. For the most part satisfactory cohesion though occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of communication are not always effective,
3. Some use of cohesion resulting in effective communication.

**Adequacy of Vocabulary for Purpose**

0. Vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication.
1. Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriacies and/or repetitions.
2. Some inappropriacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.
3. Almost no inappropriacies in vocabulary for the task. Only rare inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.

**Grammar**

0. Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate.
1. Frequent grammatical inaccuracies.
2. Some grammatical inaccuracies.
3. Almost no grammatical inaccuracies.

**Mechanical Accuracy I (Punctuation)**

0. Ignorance of conventions of punctuation.
1. Low standard of accuracy of punctuation.
2. Some inaccuracies of punctuation.
3. Almost no inaccuracies of punctuation.

**Mechanical Accuracy II (Spelling)**

0. Almost all spelling inaccurate.
1. Low standard of accuracy in spelling.
2. Some inaccuracies in spelling.
3. Almost no inaccuracies in spelling.

Figure 2. A Sample Analytic Scale

From: *Test of English for Educational Purposes*, Associated Examining Board, UK, 1984.



## Haunting Native Speakerism? Students' Perceptions toward Native Speaking English Teachers in Taiwan

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### Abstract

This paper intends to explore how Taiwanese university students perceive their native-speaking English teachers (NESTs). Mutual expectations between the NESTs and students are also investigated. Collected data include questionnaires from 107 students and interviews with three NESTs and 19 students who have filled out the questionnaire. The result shows that students expect more encouragement and interaction with the NESTs, and more relaxed activities with fewer assignments and tests. A third of the students expect NEST with a standard accent, while a quarter do not care about accent at all. The NESTs reveal their dissatisfaction toward the students' passiveness and lack of responsiveness. While students expect their NESTs to be interactive, they themselves seem to give the NESTs an impression of unwillingness to participate. The discussion centers on this dilemma and offers some suggestions for English teachers.

**Keywords:** Students' expectation, NEST, NNEST, Native speakerism

### 1. Introduction

People are becoming more interconnected in the wake of the fast-growing trend of globalization through cultural and technological exchange. English has become the primary medium of international communication (Crystal, 2003). With the overwhelming influence of English, it is apparent that the number of English learners will only soar. The discussion of teaching English is becoming quite heated as a consequence.

Traditionally, learning and teaching a foreign language has been predicated on the distinction between native and non-native speakers (Davis, 1991). Native speakers have tended to be regarded as the model. Native English speakers have the advantage over non-native speakers and are often viewed around the world as the embodiment of the English standard. Native speakers are endowed by non-native speakers with high level of credibility. In turn, non-native speakers are expected to mimic the native speaker's vocabulary, grammar, idioms and culture (See Holliday, 2005, on native speakerism).

Taiwan has been ranked in the expanding circle of concentric circle model, where English is used primarily as a foreign language (Crystal, 1997). Under the impact of English as a global language, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan made a dramatic reform in education policy. English was introduced in the curriculum at elementary schools in 2001. Since then, students at every level are required to learn English. There will be, for sure, a larger number of English teachers needed than before. In Taiwan's ESL/EFL context, non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) still predominate over native English speaking teachers (NESTs). Although there is higher number of NNESTs, NESTs seem to be favored more in the field of English teaching. However, the language one uses is extremely different from the language one teaches. English proficiency should be dependent on "what you know" rather than "who you are" (Rampton, 1990). Thus, from the early 1980s, the question of "who is a qualified English teacher?" seemed to attract more and more attention. Native speakers were accorded a prestige they did not necessarily have in the 1950s and 1960s when the grammar-translation method of language teaching prevailed. As language learners pay more attention to their spoken ability than before, native speakers became the popular choice in Taiwan. Aster (2000) notes that pedagogy, psychological preparation, and knowledge in applied linguistics are vital to the performance of any teacher. This study attempts to explore factors that affect the teaching and learning efficiency of teachers and students, using questionnaires and interviews.

## 2. Related Study

Although there are more and more voices for more equality between native and non-native teachers, the actual situation is quite another story. Todd & Pojanapunya (2009) focus on the conflict between the educational principle of equality between NESTs and NNESTs and the commercial realities of Thailand. It is worthwhile to note that a similar situation exists in the commercial advertising for ESL in both Thailand and Taiwan. Cram schools and institutions offering English language programs often promote themselves as employing NESTs and advertisements for teaching positions often require that applicants are native speakers. A plethora of studies deal with the case, for and against, NS teachers vis-a-vis their performance, attitude, and approach. Jin (2005) notes that Chinese students aspired to the British and American English standard due to a lack of opportunity and access to updated information on “World English”, which has in turn led to a blind adoration of native-speaker as the norm. Although more and more students accept the concept of “World English”, it is not easy for many to alter their conscious preference for native speakers. Ryan (1998) points out that teachers’ attitudes and belief strongly affect students’ behavior. Native teachers show more self-esteem than non-native teachers (Mahboob, 2004). Bulter (2007) examines the influence between native and non-native teachers’ accents on students’ performance; the result indicates that native teachers tend to have more confidence in their use of English.

Medgyes (1994) notes that an ideal native-speaking English teacher should possess a high degree of proficiency in the learner’s mother language. It could be easier for NESTs in the EFL setting, but compared to that in the EFL setting, NESTs would have difficulties in the ESL setting. In Medgyes’ book, he discusses the differences between native and non-native English speakers’ use of English, general attitude, attitude to teaching language, and attitude to teaching culture. In terms of their use of English, he notes that NESTs use real English and use it more confidently compared to NNESTs. This argument has been questioned by Rampton (1990) who stresses that a native speaker does not mean he inherently speaks his first language well. Ownership of language is not necessarily equal to language competence. Barratt and Contra’s (2000) accuses NESTs of discouraging learners since they have no capacity or willingness to make comparisons and contrasts to the students’ native language. Despite such disadvantages native speakers are still more popular and preferable in the English language teaching profession (Clark & Paran, 2007).

What difference does being native speaker of English make in the ESL/EFL classroom? Cook (1999) argues that language teaching would benefit by paying more attention to the L2 user rather than concentrating on the native speaker. One group of teachers should not necessarily be superior to another (Braine, 2005). What teachers should care about is how to improve their teaching through more professional training in linguistics and sociolinguistics. Most of all, they need to understand better the needs of students. Nunan (2003) asserts:

If English is a necessity, steps should be taken to ensure that teachers are adequately trained in language teaching methodology appropriate to a range of learner ages and stages, that teachers’ own language skills are significantly enhanced, that classroom realities meet curricular rhetoric, and that students have sufficient exposure to English in instructional context (p.610).

In Taiwan, English has become a necessity. Steps have also been taken to increase English proficiency in general. However, the outcome is far from being realized. Students’ communicative competence has long been neglected and hindered due to teacher-related, student-related, and educational system constraints. Teacher-related problems derive largely from NNEST’s deficiency in spoken English and lack of socio-linguistic and cultural sophistication (Li, 1998; Nunan, 2003). Students’ low proficiency in English and passive learning style do not help matters. Student reticence and passivity has an Asian cultural interpretation (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Although different perspectives exist (Cheng, 2000), many foreign teachers express a good deal of frustration in the face of student reticence and passivity (Song, 1995; Jin & Cortazzi, 1993).

According to Yang (1978) and Wang (1994), traditional EFL instruction in Taiwan focuses on teacher-centered, grammar-translation, and exam-oriented approaches. These approaches fail to meet the student need to express or comprehend messages in English when they study abroad. Ko (1985) attributes students’ low proficiency in English to inappropriate teaching methods. Scovel (1983) notes grammar-translation and exam-oriented assessment make it harder for ESL/EFL students to use English as a communicative medium.

## 3. Research Questions

Assuming that Taiwan’s official national language, Mandarin, is best taught and learned from a native Chinese speaker, then it certainly would follow that English ought to be accorded the same pedagogical consideration. From a linguistic point of view, it is easy to observe the difference between NESTs and NNESTs in terms of language competence. Phillipson (1992) uses the term “the native speaker fallacy” to refer to unequal treatment of non-native English speakers. In Taiwanese private language institutions, native English speakers are paid higher wages and receive more respect from students and parents alike. The surprising thing is that Taiwanese ESL/EFL professionalism does not count for more vis-a-vis the native English speakers’ language ability. Even more surprisingly, the native English speakers’

appearance is one of the vital factors in their employability in Taiwan's private language schools. A mere manipulator of the language, however, does not guarantee a good English teacher in the classroom. Ebele (1999) notes that:

English speakers benefit from the usual exotic allure of any foreign language, and they benefit from the commonly accepted idea that their native language is a practical skill useful in the workplace. In many cases, they were hired for teaching jobs solely on the basis of being a native speaker (p.339).

At tertiary education; however, the recruitment criteria are multi-dimensions. Clark E. & Paran (2007) note that the most important criteria for the employment of teachers are 'teaching qualifications', 'performance in interview', 'teaching experience', 'education background', 'recommendation', 'visa status', and 'native English speakers'. Although recruiters take into account each criterion, the result shows that 72.3% of the 90 respondents-- 50 private language schools, 27 universities and 13 further education colleges-- judged the 'native English speaker criterion' to be either moderately or very important. Their study indicates that the native speaker still has a privileged position in English language teaching, native speakers represent both the model speaker and the ideal teacher.

Based on the aforementioned arguments towards native teachers, we intend to elaborate the following questions:

(1) What are the university students' expectation and perception toward native teachers in general?

(2) What do the teachers and students expect of each other in their classroom interaction?

#### 4. Methodology

A survey intended to measure students' expectation on the teaching of native-speaking teachers was conducted in June 2008 in the English department at a private university located in southern part of Taiwan. This department was established in the year of 2003. There were 163 students-- 47 freshmen, 33 sophomores, 43 juniors, and 40 seniors. In addition to students, there were eight teachers, including five local teachers and three foreign teachers in this department as the survey was conducted. The questions in the survey investigate student expectations from fourteen dimensions identified in Wu (2008). Questions of related dimensions are presented in a dispersed manner instead of clustered to prevent the lingering or associative effect. For example, questions about encouragement, class atmosphere, and teacher's attitude are the second, sixth, and twelfth item in the survey. A pilot version was given to ten seniors, and modifications based on problems and feedbacks were made before the questionnaire was formally administered to the 112 students. 107 valid questionnaires were filled out by 35 freshmen, 29 sophomores, 42 juniors, and one senior. This questionnaire was conducted in June, most of the seniors had left university after commencement, so only one of the seniors filled out this questionnaire (See Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here

Three NS teachers (See Table 2) were interviewed by both authors for approximately one hour before the questionnaire was administered to the students. The interview questions are similar to those in the questionnaire; only the focus was to understand the teachers' self-evaluation and expectation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Insert Table 2 here

In the following month, after the survey was conducted, we randomly interviewed nineteen students who participated in the survey, six freshmen, six sophomore, six juniors, and one senior. The student interviews lasted ten minutes, focusing on students' ideas about their expectations vis-à-vis accent, teaching method, grammar, and essentially dimensions that showed great variance in the questionnaire. These interviews were recorded in field notes so that the students would not be afraid to share their true ideas in the presence of a recorder. Questionnaire data was analyzed using SPSS to examine correlations among the dimensions and different student groups. Interview data was compared with the survey result to investigate and explain the result, as well as provide other insights into the phenomenon in question.

##### 4.1 Questionnaire results

1) General description: what do the students expect of native speaking teachers?

1a) Expectation

Of the 107 students, 106 regard it necessary to have native-speaking teachers in the department, but only 63 think their nationality is important. One strong expectation from the students concerns the NS teachers' teaching attitude. They anticipate that NS teachers will encourage them a lot in a very relaxed classroom atmosphere, and behave like friends with them (See Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 here

The majority of the students expect the NS teachers to be flexible, use more activities than lectures, correct their pronunciation, assign little or no homework, and rarely test them. There seems to be a set of related expectations from the students on NS teachers. Expecting a relaxed class, the students hope that NS teachers will employ more activities and bring up various topics as the circumstance allows without sticking to a certain teaching plan or covering all the



necessary content. The role of NS teachers, in the students' eyes, is mainly to be a model and correct their pronunciation, instead of being a traditional teacher who demands formal assessment like assignments and tests. In other words, the students wish to have fun in the class while improving their listening and speaking at the same time (See Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 here

The figures in these dimensions show stronger expectations and relatively low variations in these dimensions. For the other dimensions on teaching materials, speaking speed, grading criteria, and attention to grammar, the students made no strong preferences. (For a detailed description of the questionnaire result, see Appendix I).

1b) the dissonance between expectation and reality

The students complained that the NS teachers were not flexible enough in class (a difference of 1.76 in score), using too much of a lecturing style and too few activities (1.42). They also expect more encouragement (1.39) and attention to pronunciation (1.43) from the NS teachers, who they regard not friendly enough (1.99). Judging from the students' expectation of class atmosphere and teachers' encouragement, the main reason behind the dissonance between expectation and reality could be their unreasonable anticipation in these dimensions. The issue of pronunciation is tied to the assumptions concerning accent. The result also reveals that the NS teacher give fewer tests and assignments in the conversation class.

1c) compare the above differences to teachers' interviews

The NS teachers are not satisfied that the students are "very passive, lack of opinions and feedback" (Tom), "dependent and serious" (Gary), "immature and disrespectful" (Andy).

Tom: When I ask their opinions and comments in the class, only few of them responded. I wonder if they didn't understand what I said or they didn't prepare the assigned homework.

Gary: The students need to be more independent. They lack of critical thinking. When I ask them to express their point-of-views, they keep quiet all the time and wait for my answer.

Andy: The students come to class late, and have their food or snack in the class. I ask them to discuss in pairs or groups, some of them just chat in their native language and some just sit there.

It is likely that a gap exists in the interactions between the NS teacher and the students. The students hope for an extremely relaxed environment while they remain passive, dependent, and thus appear serious. However, NS teachers are just like other teachers, who offer adequate, not excessive encouragement, and maintain a proper distance with the students.

2) A bi-polar view on the issue of accent

The expectation on the NS teachers' accent varies greatly among the students. 23 students think it does not matter as long as it is understandable (a score of 1), and 30 students expect standard English from the NS teachers (a score of 10). The majority of the rest fall between 5 and 8 (See Figure 3).

Insert Figure 3 here

At the first impression the result seems to indicate the confusion on the norm of accent among the students. There are three kinds of perceptions on accent: not important, very important, and somewhat important. Each perception appeals to relatively similar proportions of the students. With the increasing number of foreign citizens in Taiwan, most Taiwanese began to be more flexible in their requirements of the accent of NS teachers. As the contacts broaden, people gradually find that almost all NS speakers have accents; Americans from the South speak very differently from the Americans from the New England. As a result, students' expectations change with the environment. This shows that students' expectations are fluid, and we can help students overcome the stereotypical bias they have regarding NS teachers.

But student interviews point out a problem in the design of the questionnaire. For some of them, standard English is also the best understandable English. The definition of being understood perhaps should not be on the other side of standard accent.

A senior: The accents in real world are of all kinds, so accent is not important. We should get used to different accents. It doesn't matter what the NS teacher's accent is.

A junior: The NS teacher should not have accents. Our level is already pretty low, and how can we understand a teacher with accents?

Another junior: the NS teacher's nationality is not important, but the accent is. Their English should be easy to understand, like Andy's (one of the NS teachers), who speaks slowly and uses easy vocabulary. Teacher G speaks too fast, and many sounds are stuck together. He has some accents, and I have problem understanding his words. I think understandability is the most important, easy to comprehend.

The dichotomy of standard English and English with understandable accent is problematic in light of the view. Presumably many students regard standard English, or the most popular American English as the most understandable accent. And under the priority of understandability, the speed and vocabulary the NS teacher uses may play an even more significant role than accent, which is very hard to define or categorize.

### **5. Discussion & Pedagogical Suggestion**

Taiwanese students and parents used to define native-speaking English speakers by their race or the color of skin. Affected by globalization, parents and students are more or less changing their impression toward native-speaking English teachers. Because in the past the translation-grammar method prevailed in Taiwan, the need for native English teachers was lower than it is now. The emphasis was on assessment and exams, students in Taiwan failing to apply English in communicative situation with the same skill.

What elements influence learner's achievement in language learning? What factors motivate student interest in language learning? In our study, students deem foreign teachers are indispensable. For most students, foreign teachers should possess a good sense of humor, standard or understandable accent and pronunciation, and better interaction with students. However, their initial attitude toward foreign teachers has changed. One of the seniors noted that foreign teachers offered them a practical chance to practice English. But, she also complained that foreign teachers seldom corrected their mistakes while they were involved in their group discussion. They expected more interaction between them and foreign teachers. In contrast, foreign teachers expressed their disagreement, saying that most of the students were passive and not enthusiastic enough to interact with them. There seemed to exist a certain misunderstanding between teachers and learners.

In the very beginning, most students took for granted that they could learn more from foreign teachers than from local teachers. According to their own experience, most expressed different levels of uneasiness and lack of confidence when facing foreign teachers. Students rarely felt this way when facing non-native English teachers. They expected native English teachers teach "real" and "authentic" English, namely the accepted standard English. Foreign teachers were also more popular because of their appearance, way of talking, and flexible teaching approach. (Norton, 1997; Tang, 1997) The reality, however, is very different in terms of teaching approach, teaching attitude, and knowledge of English.

For NS teacher to teach better and local students to learn more, the expectation gap between NS teachers and local students needs to be bridged. This can be done in a myriad of policies and measures. Here we suggest three possible ways to amend this perceptual deviance that may harm the teaching and learning process. First, universities and high schools should consider how to interact with NS teachers in an orientation meeting for incoming new student before any course begins if there are NS teachers working for the institute. They should also offer training sessions for NS teachers who have little experiences teaching students from a different culture. Second, the school might consider having a NS teacher team up with a local teacher or teaching assistant to make the instruction more effective. Third, both NS teachers and local teachers are suggested to rethink their roles and adjust self-expectation as the world changes rapidly.

The most direct way to close the conceptual gap between the teacher and students is to take time to discuss it. One reason why this stereotype exists in the first place may be the lack of open information that students receive. Many students have little experience interacting with foreigners. Thus, a lot of the misconceptions students have come from biased messages in the media and traditional rhetoric about foreigners. As the survey result indicates, almost half of the students no longer deem the nationality and accent of a NEST important. The environment has changed, and more students are getting into contact with foreigners. If offered the opportunity, these students can provide first-hand experience and fairer impressions for others who still hold to the old stereotype. While some clarification from teachers helps, the testimony from their peers is more powerful and effective. If the department or the school is able to include in its orientation a discussion of this issue, such gap in understanding would be greatly bridged. Seeing each teacher as a unique individual and accepting all other traits of the teacher-- such as race, gender, and language without forming predetermining perception from these traits-- is the underlying norm that the orientation intends to help students adopt. On the other hand, new NS teachers might also carry certain stereotypes about Taiwanese students, such as being obedient and lacking opinions, and these misconceptions also need to be clarified as well. The educational and societal environment in Taiwan has gone through drastic transformations in the past two decades; as a result, students may grow up in very different contexts. While more cultural understanding from NS teachers would definitely benefit teaching and learning, treating each student as a special human being is a must for every teacher.

Simultaneous team teaching involving a NEST and a local instructor has proved to be effective in international school settings (Pardy, 2004) and has been implemented in TEFL or TESL situations, particularly in Japan (Tajino & Tajino, 2000) and Hong Kong (Lai, 1999). The idea, which has been around for decades, has not caught on because of the controversy surrounding team teaching (Benoit, 2001). At secondary level team teaching may be too radical for most schools, but at the tertiary level, it is certainly realistic to have a native-speaking instructor and a local graduate student as the teaching assistant, who handles the administrative works and provides necessary supplementary explanations. Teaching assistants are common in colleges, and with a local TA assisting the NEST should be able to overcome the

unfair expectations (few assignments and tests, relaxed atmosphere for motivation) from the students.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that students' perception toward NS teachers is mixed. Admittedly, NS teachers are recognized as assets to English learning, but they are also advised to adjust to the changing teaching/learning environment. Language learning and teaching are closely related for both teachers and students. A intercultural language teacher need to be prepared to adjust her/his role from a trainer to a trainee. S/he intends to educate learners towards international and intercultural learning should be international and intercultural learners her/him self. Learning and teaching a foreign language, for both teachers and students, implies a degree of intercultural learning. Possessing this attitude will facilitate both foreign teachers and local students to increase the learning and teaching efficiency. Thus, how to improve teachers' personal weakness and take advantage of their own strengths is one of the crucial issues for any teachers of different culture.

## 7. Limitation of this study

This is a small-scale study, with limited samples and participants. However, the main goal of this study is to present one of the many ESL/EFL contexts in Taiwan. The results of this study will only reflect a tiny portion of Taiwanese students' perception toward native English teachers. Approximately one third of the participating students had never been taught by a NEST before they studied in the university and they usually had only one or two courses taught by a NEST each semester, so most of the students had relatively little knowledge of NESTs. It is expected that more contact and knowledge of NESTs will change how students perceive them, but we do not have the data to support the claim. Other Taiwanese students may have different expectations toward NESTs. The same applies to other NESTs in Taiwan, who may see their students differently.

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#### Appendix I Questionnaire & Result

Survey on the expectation of native-speaking teachers (NS teachers)

Year: ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior Gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male

●Do you think it necessary for our department to have native-speaking teacher? ☐ No ☐ Yes, we need \_\_\_\_\_ (write down the number of native speaking teachers needed.)

●Is the nationality of the NS teachers important? ☐ No ☐ Yes, I hope their nationality is \_\_\_\_\_

Question	Average	Std.	interpretation
In your expectation, NS teachers' speaking speed should be (1 slowest 10 fastest) Please write down the number between	6.05	1.73	Normal speed
In your expectation, NS teachers should encourage the students (1 once in a while 10 all the times)	8.22	1.96	Much encouragement
In your expectation, the teaching materials by the NS teachers should be (1 easy 10 hard)	5.60	1.78	Medium difficulty
In your expectation, NS teachers' teaching style should be (1 impromptu 10 following syllabus strictly)	4.32	2.51	A bit flexible
In your expectation, NS teachers' accent should be (1 doesn't matter if understandable 10 standard)	6.28	<b>3.34</b>	Mixed expectation
In your expectation, the atmosphere in the NS teachers' class should be(1 solemn 10 relaxed)	8.38	1.91	Relaxed atmosphere
In your expectation, NS teachers should have (1 more lectures & less activities 10 more activities & less lectures)	6.36	2.45	A bit more activities
In your expectation, NS teachers should pay attention to grammar (1 a little bit 10 very much)	5.62	2.40	Adequate grammar
In your expectation, NS teachers should pay attention to your pronunciation (1a little bit 10 very much)	7.58	2.10	More pronunciation corrections

In your expectation, NS teachers grading should be (1 generous 10 strict)	4.83	1.99	Normal
In your expectation, NS teachers should grade based on (1 totally effort 10 totally proficiency / ability)	4.30	2.16	A bit more effort
In your expectation, NS teachers' attitude toward the students should be (1 maintain the authority of a teacher 10 like friends)	8.33	1.90	Friend-like relationship
In your expectation, the amount of assignments given by NS teachers should be (1 very little 10 much)	3.40	1.83	Few assignments
In your expectation, NS teachers should give a test (1 very rarely 10 frequently)	2.86	1.71	Few tests

Table 1. Number of participants

Class	Number of Students	Number of Respondents	Number of Interview
Freshman	47	35	6
Sophomore	33	29	6
Junior	43	42	6
Senior	40	1	1
Total	163	112	19

Table 2. Background of NS teachers

Participant	Sex	Nationality	Years of Teaching Experience
Andy	M	Canada	6
Gary	M	Bolivia	2
Tom	M	U.S.A	3

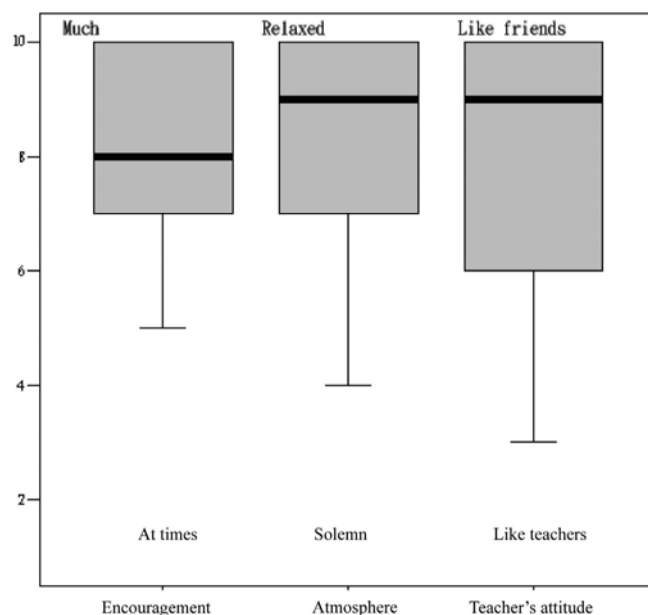


Figure 1 Students' strong expectation on NS teachers' attitude

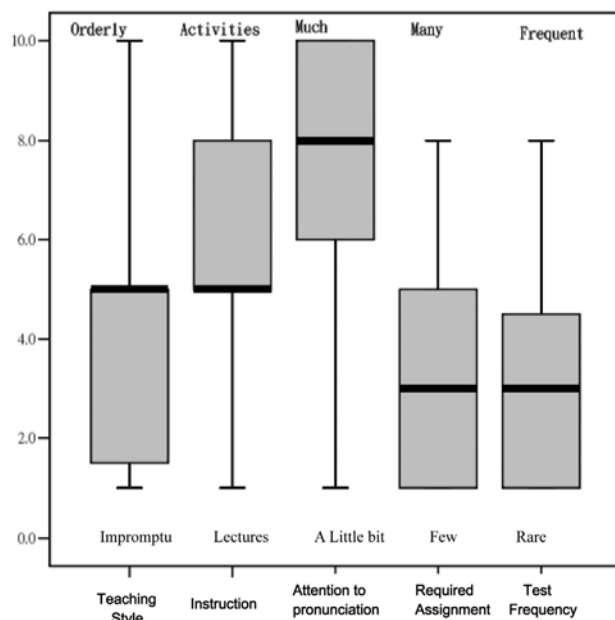


Figure 2. Students' expectation

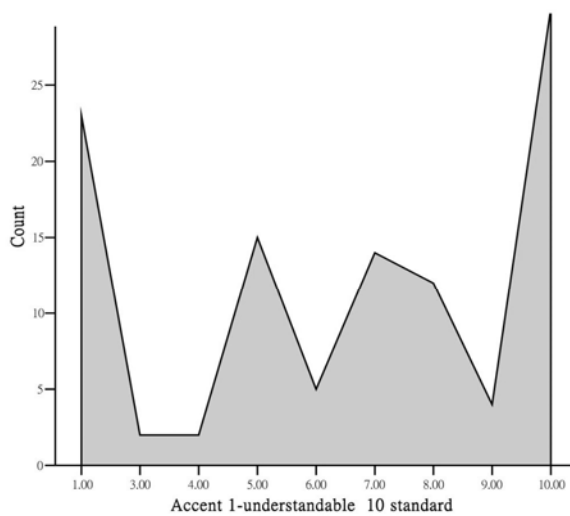


Figure 3. Students' attitudes toward accent



## Text Coherence in Translation

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### Abstract

In the thesis a coherent text is defined as a continuity of senses of the outcome of combining concepts and relations into a network composed of knowledge space centered around main topics. And the author maintains that in order to obtain the coherence of a target language text from a source text during the process of translation, a translator can utilize the following approaches: retention of the continuity of senses of a text; reconstruction of the target text for the purpose of continuity; coherence complement in translation and the extracting and foregrounding of topic sentences in translation.

**Keywords:** Coherence, Text, Continuity, Reconstruction, Coherence complement, Foregrounding

Coherence concerns the ways in which the components of the textual world, i.e., the configuration of concepts and relations which underlie the surface text, are mutually accessible and relevant. (Beaugrande & Dressler, 2002) A concept is definable as a configuration of knowledge (cognitive content) which can be recovered or activated with more or less unity and consistency in the mind. Relations are the links between concepts which appear together in a textual world: each link would bear a designation of the concept it connects to. Thus coherence will be envisioned as the outcome of combining concepts and relations into a network composed of knowledge space centered around main topics.

And for further discussion, language users are supposed to know something about meaning and sense. If meaning is used to designate the potential of a language expression (or other sign) for representing and conveying knowledge (i.e., virtual meaning), then they can use sense to designate the knowledge that actually is conveyed by expressions occurring in a text. Many expressions have several virtual meanings, but under normal conditions, only one sense in a text. If the intended sense is not at once clear, non-determinacy is present. A lasting non-determinacy could be called ambiguity if it is presumably not intended, or polyvalence if the text producer did in fact intend to convey multiple senses at the same time. Though not yet well explained, the human ability to discover intended senses and preclude or resolve ambiguities is one of the most amazing and complex processes of communication.

A text is also the record of the thinking process of the language user(s) either in written or in spoken form. It is a semantic unit and pragmatic unit consisting of a group of coherent sentences which are also cohesive within and between the sentences generally. And a text "makes sense" because there is a continuity of senses among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text. A "senseless" or "nonsensical" text is one in which text receivers can discover no such continuity, usually because there is a serious mismatch between the configuration of concepts and relations expressed and the receivers prior knowledge of the world. This continuity of senses can be defined as the foundation of coherence, being the mutual access and relevance within a configuration of concepts and relations. The configuration underlying a text is the textual world, which may or may not agree with the established version of the "real world", i.e., that version of the human situation considered valid by a society or social group. Note, however, that the textual world contains more than the sense of the expressions in the surface text: cognitive processes contribute a certain amount of commonsense knowledge derived from the participants' expectations and experience regarding the organization of events and situations. Hence, even though the senses of expressions are the most obvious and accessible contribution to the meaningfulness of texts, they cannot be the whole picture.

It can be safely concluded, therefore, that a coherent text is a continuity of senses of the outcome of combining concepts and relations into a network composed of knowledge space centered around main topics. And this conclusion can be directed towards the process of translation to yield a truthful target text with smoothness.

In order to obtain the coherence of a target language text from a source text during the process of translation, four solutions have been presented in this thesis: retention of the continuity of senses of a text; reconstruction of the target text for the purpose of continuity; coherence complement in translation and the extracting and foregrounding of topic sentences in translation. Such points will be illustrated one by one in the following.

### 1. Retention of the Continuity of Senses of a Text in Translation

Retention of the continuity of senses of a text refers to leave the continuity of senses of a source text unchanged and on

the basis of this a translator tries to comprehend and to produce a faithful target text in the process of translation.

Example 1: All this good cheer was plainly too much for human nature, which seems to crave a regular dose of impending doom. *That was not missing in 1988, when fears about the environment loomed larger than ever before.* Ocean pollution seemed to touch every continent; medical wastes washed up on America's Atlantic beaches, and dying seals on the shores of the North Sea...

The italicised part of the text has been translated as follows:

Zai 1988 nian ren men dui huanjin de danyou bi yiwang renhe shihou dou gengweijiaju de yinian li, nazhong lingren huanxinguwu de shi ye meiyou quedaio.

While in the following part of the text, the readers can't see any "good cheer"; instead, they can find a lot of problems. Hence, the target text would not be coherent. According to the continuity of senses of the text, a translator can infer from the whole text that the word "that" in the italicised part refers to something bad instead of any "good cheer". After this inferring a coherent target text can be attained as follows:

Chinese version: Dui ren de benxing er yan, hao xinxi shizai shi duo de guofenle, yinwei renmen sihu zongshi xiang tingdao xie mori jijiang lailin de huai xixiao. Zai renmen dui huanjing wenti bi yiwang renhe shihou dou gengjia youxinzhongchong de 1988 nian li, dao ye bu fa zheyang de huai xiaoxi. Haiyang wuran sihu yi yangji gege dalu, feiqi de yiyao laji bei chong dao meiguo daxiyang yan an, yanyanyixi de haibao ye piaofu dao beihao de haitanshang. (Li, 2001:163)

Example 2: Mifeng zhe wujian, zui ai laodong. Guangdong tianqi hao, hua you duo, mifeng yi nian sijie dou bu xian zhe. Liang de mi duo, ziji chi de ke youxian. Mei hui ge mi, ta gei ziji liu yi diandian tang, gou tamen chi jiu xing le. Tamen conglai bu zheng, ye bu jijiao shenme, haishi jixu laodong, jixu nianmi, zhengri zhengyue bucilaoku...

English version 1: The bees are industrious while our province has good weather and plenty of flowers. They work the whole year round, and eat only a fraction of the honey they produce. Each time we extract it we leave them a little sugar. They never argue or complain, just go on producing honey day after day. (Volume of Modern Chinese Prose with English Translation, p281)

English version 2: The bees are industrious. They work the whole year round, since our province has warm weather and plenty of flowers. Though they produce much honey, they eat only a fraction of it. Each time we extract it we leave them a little sugar. They never argue or complain, just go on producing honey day after day. (Li, 2001: 166)

By comparison, we can see that the second version is much more faithful to the original text for it retains the continuity of senses and the coherent relationship of the original text.

## 2. Reconstruction of the Target Text for the Purpose of Continuity

Some linguists hold that the Chinese texts are developed in an inductive way while the English ones are developed in a deductive way. They contribute this difference to the thought patterns of the two peoples. The English thought pattern is straightforward while the Chinese thought pattern is spiral.

So a text in English is usually centered around a topic in the form of topic sentence or topic paragraph and then it is developed directly by many sentences in a sequence. To secure coherence the producer usually deduces the topic in such ways as:

By classification development;

By chronological development;

By spatial development;

By definition development;

By exemplification development;

By comparison development;

By contrast development;

By cause-effect development and so on (Xiao, 2002:120).

While a text in Chinese generally adopts the four steps in composition—starting with an introduction, then elucidation of the theme, transition to another view point, and finally summing up (Zhang and Zhang, 1998: 29).

Therefore, there exists certain striking difference in the composition of texts in the two languages.

And translation is not only the process of the interchange of the linguistic symbols between two languages, more often than not, it is the interchange of thinking processes between language users on the basis of the general models in the two languages, especially, it is so when translation is conducted on text level. Consequently, it is quite necessary for a



translator to conduct certain reconstruction in the process of translation.

Example 3: Pashanhu zongshi yexinbobo de qitu zhanling mei yi cun qiang. Zai na wushu zhi juanqu xiangshang de tengman zhong, you yi zhi jihu panshang le na jianjian de wuding. Zheshi you yizhen feng gualai, ba ta xuan zai le bankongzhong.

Liu Chuan cong chuankou wang qu, kandao le duimian qiang shang de zhege jingtou, xia yishi de xiao le qilai(1).

“Ni shi teng, wo shi qiang.” You yi tian ta dui Xiao Mei shuo(2).

Ta yanzhong de na zhi tengman hua cheng le ta(nv) de xingxiang(3). Zai ta xiang ta(nv) shuo le zhe ju hua zhihou, ta(female) jue qi le zuba zhuan shen zou le(4).

“Wo meiyong biyao mofang dianying zhong de nan zhujue, jiakuai le jiaobu qu zhui ta(female).” Ta xiang(5). Ta liang ye xiang suoyou nianqing de qinglv na yang tiansheng hao duqi, ke mole, zongshi ta(female) lai zhao ta, yiban bu chu yige xingqi. Ta hen you xingxin. Zheci youxie fangchang. Ta na fu ming wei *Qiangzhe* de youhua hua qu le zhengzheng yige yue de shijian, ke ta(female) hai meiyong lai, lian xing ye meiyong yi feng. (selected from *Wall* by Zhou Weibo)⑥

English version: Creepers are always ambitiously trying to crawl over every inch of the wall. One of the numerous curling vines had almost crept onto the steep roof of the house when a sudden gust of wind blew it off in mid air.

Liu Chuan happened to catch sight of the scene on the opposite wall through the window, and he couldn't help smiling. In his eyes the vine was transformed into the image of Xiao Mei.

“You are a creeper while I am a wall,” he had once said to her. At his remark, she pursed her lips and went away.

“I won't imitate the hero in the film and run after her,” he thought.

They used to quarrel quite often just as other young lovers did. But in the end it was always she who would first come to him for reconciliation within a week or so. He had been quite confident that this argument would end similarly. Yet there was something different about this time. During the whole month he spent on his oil painting entitled “The Fitter,” she hadn't turned up once nor even sent word. (Song, 2003: 451)

From the source text, it is noted that there is a causal relationship between sentence (3) and sentence (1), so they are put together in the target text. There is a temporal and a weak causal relationship as well between sentence (2) and sentence (4), hence they are translated as one paragraph. The reflection of his is contained in sentence (5), thus translated as an individual paragraph. The rest of the text is a comparison between the past and the present, which has been dealt with as one paragraph in the target text. After the reconstruction of the message in the source text, a logic target text with clear organization has come into existence. From the example we can undoubtedly see the necessity of the reconstruction of the target text for the purpose of continuity.

### 3. Coherence Complement in Translation

The utilization of texts almost certainly involves steady interactions and compromises between the actual text materials being presented, and the participants' prior disposition, according to conditions which, though flexible and variable, are by no means unsystematic. (Beaugrande and Dressler: 2002:136)

What's more, coherence, together with cohesion, is text-centred notion, designating operations directed at the text materials. In addition, it is necessary to require user-centred notions which are brought to bear on the activity of textual communication at large, both by producers and by receivers. And in some cases there exists implicature—the question of how a language user comes to understand more than is actually said—in a text.

Therefore, a translator assumes the responsibility of maintaining the coherence of a target text from the perspective of the receivers for the convenience of the receivers retrieving information from the target text during the process of translation. For the purpose of this, it is necessary for a translator to complement certain elements in the target text for the sake of the receivers.

Example 4: Wo dangshi shi jieguan zhongyang meishu xueyuan de jun daibiao. Tingshuo Bai Shi laoren shi jiaoshou, meiyue dao xuexiao yici, hua yi zhang hua gei xuesheng kan, zuo shifan biaoan. You de xuesheng tichu yao ba ta de gongzi ting diao.”

Wo shuo: “Zheyang de lao huajia, mei yue lai yici hua yi zhang hua, jiu shi hen da de gong xian. ---”

English version: I was then the military representative at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. I was told that Baishi was a professor there and that he came to the academy once a month. Every time he came he would paint a picture as an example for the students to imitate, but some of them proposed that his salary should be stopped since he came so infrequently.

“For an artist as old as he is, to come once a month and produce a painting is a great contribution,” I explained—(Selected Modern Chinese Prose with English Translation.P258) (Quoted from Li, 2001:185)

The italicized parts in the above example are elements complemented by the translators of the source texts. Such parts have played a key role in creating the coherence of the target text for the reception of the receivers. The target texts would otherwise be difficult for the perception of the readers.

#### 4. The Extracting and Foregrounding of Topic Sentences in Translation

The importance of topic sentences in the organization and development of English texts has been covered in section 2. And it is pointed out that an English text generally would contain at least one topic paragraph or one topic sentence. Such a pattern is familiar to a large number of language users, native and foreign.

And it is advisable for a translator to perceive the importance of the function of topic sentences in translating both English and Chinese texts.

In order to achieve coherence in the target text during the process of translation, topic sentences can be extracted and fore-grounded by the translator from a source text for the purpose of coherence in the target text. Unless topic concepts are activated, the processing of the textual world is not feasible because in many texts there are no control centers to show the main ideas (Beaugrande and Dressler: 2002, 168). And such a treatment in translation will undoubtedly facilitate text receivers' comprehension of the target text.

Example 5: Taiwan gaoyang xie de tongshu xiaoshuo *The Complete Story of Hu Xueyan* jin ji nian lai zai nei di yi ban zai ban. You xiaoxi shuo, zao ji nian, yi Hu Xueyan shengping shiji wei xiansuo gaibian de dianshiju "Bayue guihua xiang", meiyou biao xian chu Hu Xueyan linghuo jingshang de jingsui, yi luohou yu shangpin jingji de shidai chaoliule, yushi xinjin you liangbu zhongduo shangjia rexin touzi de dianshi lianxu ju zhengzai tongshi kaiji paishe. Duici, yiwei mou gognzi de zongjingli zhichu: "Hu Xueyan da xing qi dao, shi zhongguo shang jie de bei ai."

Pingjie yige ren, xian yao liaojie ta shi shenme ren, liaojie ta de lishi. Hu Xueyan, zuji anhui jixi, shengyu 1823 nian, fuqin zao shi, jia ping. Shaonian shi dushu bu duo....

English version: Mr. Hu Xueyan has no doubt become the focus of publishing and show business these years., a bestseller by Gao Yang in Taiwan, has seen many reprints and impressions in China. A TV series based on his life was put on air years ago, which would soon be succeeded by another two series. The reason for the cast of the new series, it is said, is that the previous one, entitled *Fragrant Osmanthus In Mid-autumn*, failed to present the essence of Hu's business philosophy, and failed to catch up with the tide of commodity economy. So many companies are ardent in sponsoring the series that one general manager in China has pointed out that it is really a tragedy for the Chinese business circle to prettify Hu Xueyan.

It is a tragedy because Hu Xueyan was only a shrewd but not so decent businessman. Born in Jixi, Anhui province in 1823, Hu was brought up in a poor family, with little schooling. Latter he moved to Hangzhou and... (Yao, 2000)

When comparing the target text with the source text, we can see that two topic sentences have appeared at the beginning of each paragraph of the target text. The topic sentences are extracted from each paragraph of the source text and have been foregrounded so that a coherent target text has come into existence. And a logic relation between the two paragraphs has been established by repetition of the word tragedy in the second paragraph of the target text which enhances the continuity of the target text. If the topic sentences were not provided, it would be very hard for a reader to grasp the focus of information of the text.

Example 6: Many man-made substances are replacing certain natural materials because either the quantity of the natural product can not meet our ever-increasing requirements or, more often, because the physical property of the synthetic substance which is the common name for man-made materials, has been chosen and even emphasized so that it would be of the greatest use in the fields in which it is to be applied.

Chinese version: Renzao cailiao tong cheng wei hecheng cailiao. Xuduo renzao cailiao zhengzai daiti mouxie tianran cailiao, zhe huozhe shi youyu tianran chanpin de shuliang buneng manzu ri yi zengzhang de xuyao, huozhe wangwang shi renmen xuanze le hecheng cailiao de yixie wuli xingzhi bing jia yi tuchu er zaocheng de. Yinci, hecheng cailiao zai qi yingyong lingyue zhong juyou jida de yongtu.

The first sentence is the topic sentence which is extracted from the source text and foregrounded in the target text. By doing this, the target text becomes a coherent one; the information points of the target text are very clear and easy for the readers to follow.

In a word, a translator, in terms of semantic and cognitive level, can yield a truthful text by the employment of the above-mentioned means: retention of the continuity of senses of a text; reconstruction of the target text for the purpose of continuity; coherence complement in translation and the extract and foregrounding of topic sentences in translation. Such means can serve as the basis of translation on the textual level

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## Enhancing the Quality of EAP Writing through Overt Teaching

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### Abstract

This paper examines how overt teaching is instrumental in reducing subject-verb agreement (SVA) errors of Malaysian EAP learners which in turn improves the quality of their writing. The researchers used overt teaching of these grammatical items, that is, SVA and investigated how this method has significantly benefitted the learners who were second year university students from different cultural and language backgrounds. Data was collected using a pre-test and a post-test. Even though the learners had spent more than a decade learning the English language since their early education, the data collected in the pre-test showed that they made gross SVA errors in their writing. Treatment in the form of overt teaching of SVA was given to the learners, after which the post-test was administered. The comparison of data of the two tests revealed significant improvements in the learners' usage of SVA which resulted in improved quality of their writing. The major findings on the learners' grammatical problems especially in SVA and their response to overt teaching prove that overt teaching enhances the quality of EAP writing produced by students.

**Keywords:** Overt teaching, Subject-verb agreement, Errors, EAP writing

### 1. Introduction

The dominant language in Malaysia is *Bahasa Malaysia* which is the medium of instruction in schools but the English language also plays an important role in the country. Therefore, students are exposed to the language at a very tender age. However, despite spending between 11 to 13 years of learning English as a second language, the Malaysian learners are still not proficient in the English language. Therefore, "teaching English language is a big challenge in this country" (Malaysia) (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al., 2008). The majority of Malaysian learners have still not mastered the grammatical rules of the English Language. They have been exposed to a communicative syllabus which focuses more on communicative competence rather than grammatical competence. However, grammatical competence is a major component of communicative competence and gives the form or the structures of the language. There is no doubt that "formal grammar is an important aspect, and with all its faults, which are grievous, traditional grammar is better than no grammar at all" (Bloor, 1986). Therefore, it is not surprising that even after many years of studying English with the Malaysian communicative syllabus, they still fail to acquire high levels of grammatical accuracy. Sharifah Zakiah et al.'s (2009) study proved that the level of grammatical accuracy manifested in oral performances of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) graduates seems to be quite low.

Kroll and Schafer (quoted in Frodesen as cited in Tan, 2005) suggested that teachers should look at students' errors not simply as failures, but as windows into their minds. Shaughnessy (as cited in Tan 2005) suggested that teachers should teach students to keep a list of personal grammar trouble spots. Rei-Noguchi (as cited in Tan 2005) suggested that English language teachers should focus on just a few key grammatical issues that show up in students' language use. The data from the study done by Sharifah Zakiah et al. (2009) revealed a desperate need on the part of UiTM students to undergo further remedial help on basic grammatical rules and structures in English. It was further shown that the most frequent grammatical errors that Malaysian students often have difficulty with seem to be the most basic and most anticipated errors such as noun number, SVA and verb tense due to the structure of their first language (L1), *Bahasa Malaysia*. Since SVA is an area of great difficulties for the students, the researchers decided to focus on this area.

In order to improve the students' proficiency level of the English language, the researchers used overt teaching. Ellis

(2003) pointed out that teachers need to take into account three principles when teaching grammar. First, learners need to focus on both meaning and form when learning a second language. (This is when the Malaysian communicative syllabus is lacking as it does not pay much attention to the form of the language). Secondly, learners need to notice and comprehend the grammatical forms in input or exposure. Finally, learners' awareness of grammatical forms helps them to acquire grammatical features slowly and gradually. The students' proficiency level of the English language improved significantly when the researchers used overt teaching which was proven to be effective as the subjects made fewer SVA errors in the post-test as compared to the great number of errors made in the pre-test before treatment was given. Therefore, attention to form can assist learners to move from one stage to another stage of acquisition more rapidly.

Many studies which were conducted have proven that verb forms particularly SVA is an area that poses problems to learners. Bhatia (1974) conducted an error analysis study at University of New Delhi. The subjects were second year Bachelor of Arts students aged about 17 with Hindi as their mother tongue. They wrote a 250-word free composition for their regular class work which showed that verb forms and tense sequence made up 40 per cent of the errors and that of SVA was 20 per cent.

Vongthieries (1974) studied selected English grammatical difficulties of 30 advanced Thai students at Ohio State University. She analysed their informal essays and discovered that errors in the verb system accounted for the highest frequency of errors (32.4 per cent). This was sub-divided into other categories with tenses (44.8 per cent) as the highest percentage and SVA came second at 20.8 per cent. Krairussamee's (1982) analysis of the errors made in the compositions written by 153 first year university students in Bangkok also revealed that verb form errors were errors of the highest frequency (32.56 per cent). This was sub-divided into different categories with tense and verb forms having the highest percentage of 55.24 per cent and that of SVA coming in second at 20.42 per cent.

Elliot (1983) examined and identified errors in descriptive (non-scientific) writing of Singapore's Nanyang University graduates in science and mathematics. The 20 candidates wrote two essays of 150 words each. There was a control group of 20 candidates from University of Singapore. The situation in Singapore is similar to that in Malaysia. Learners attempt to learn the correct form of the second language (L2) in an environment where the first language (L1) and a deviant form of L2 are used. The standard form of L2 exists only in the classroom. As such, the non-standard English that is used by the majority of the population has an influence on the standard form of L2. "In Singapore, communication in English is often achieved without the grammatically correct use of verbs" (Elliot, 1983). The two groups surveyed by Elliot showed difficulty with verbs, with agreement of subject and verb, especially in the third person singular present. This situation is similar to that faced by the subjects in this present study.

Marlyna et al. (as cited in Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al. 2008) observed the occurrence of mistakes in SVA and copula "be". These researchers stated that "the failure of acquiring SVA form among most students is rather predictable. The absence of this structure in the Malay language has significantly deterred the students from acquiring it." Similarly, Dalrymple (as cited in Kusutani n.d.) found that Japanese students also face problems in using the copula "be" in the English language as the copula "be" is absent in sentences in Japanese. These Japanese students are not familiar with the copula "be" and SVA. In SVA, problems occur when the verb has to be inflected in the present tense to agree with the subject. The verbs must agree with the subjects for the copula "be" in the past tense and the continuous tenses. Also for the present perfect tense, the verb "have" must agree with the subjects. The findings of Marlyna et al.'s (as cited in Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al. 2008) research showed that 46.83 per cent of learners' mistakes were on SVA. The researchers argued that this is due to the fact that SVA is not required in the Malay Language. In addition, Bailis et al. (1994) found out that SVA is considered a common error but argued that not all students need instruction on all types of SVA errors. They found out that students who scored nine or less on their writing placement test committed more SVA errors than students who scored above that level. The results of their studies support this present support that the most frequent type of error is the general category of a verb not agreeing with its subject.

Law (2005) studied the acquisition of English SVA by Cantonese speakers and found that learners showed very obvious evidence of the influences of their first language, that is, Cantonese. It was found that these grammar errors were related to SVA including plural singular (11.31 per cent), tenses (31.55 per cent), negation (4.67 per cent) and interrogative (4.17 per cent) making up more than 50 per cent of the errors made. This shows that SVA is also the most difficult areas for the Cantonese learners.

Despite its difficulty for learners, SVA is one of the basic grammatical knowledge every learner must acquire in order to communicate fluently and effectively in English whether in the written or spoken form (Tan 2005). However, most Malaysian students learning English face great difficulties in this area. Sharifah Zakiah et al. (2009) recommend that teachers introduce consciousness-raising techniques to sensitize learners to the various forms and meanings of structures. Ellis and Long (as cited by Gao 2009) "found that form instruction is most effective when it is focused on raising learners' awareness of how a structure is formed, what it means, and how it is used rather than on practising drills for accuracy". A number of studies have been conducted in the area of SVA and it has been revealed that overt teaching is effective in reducing the SVA errors made by students. Wei (2008) stressed the need for teachers'

intervention as he believed that “without timely instruction and correction, the errors will stay”. Corder (as cited by Wei 2008) stated that “sufficient input of the target language is the effective method to overcome the negative transfer of native language”.

Overt teaching involves the explanation of the rules of a new structure either through the deductive (direct) approach or the inductive (discovery) approach. Direct or deductive instruction involves oral or written explanations of a given rule usually at the beginning of a lesson. In the inductive approach, the learners are provided with data which illustrate a particular grammatical structure which they need to analyze to arrive at some generalization, for instance, the students are presented with a text containing a lot of examples of SVA for which they have to identify the rule concerning that target grammatical item, in this case, SVA. The researchers in this study use both the deductive and inductive approaches in their overt teaching of SVA rules. According to Paradowski (2007), the primary task of instruction is to make clear the rule/concept to help learners grasp and internalise it in order to make it operative in their language performance.

Tan (2005) investigated the types of SVA errors found in the writing of Bachelor of Education TESL first year students and found out that overt teaching in the form of drill exercises were effective in reducing the SVA errors made. The findings from the study revealed that there was a 72.7 per cent reduction in the number of SVA errors after treatment was given indicating that the drill exercises were effective in bringing about this reduction. This study supports her findings as the subjects in this study also made significantly less SVA errors after treatment which has guided them to “understand the nature of the errors made” (Ho, 2005: 1). According to Selinker (1992), the process of making errors provides learning opportunities to learners. The subjects’ violation of the SVA rules allows the researchers to explicitly help them deal with their language used in writing. Thus, this form of teaching overtly focuses on language lessons that emphasise on the learners’ weaknesses and problem areas.

Andrews (2007) studied the effects of implicit and explicit instruction on simple and complex grammatical structures for adult English Language learners. This study found that teaching made a difference as both treatment groups learnt both the complex and simple forms after implicit and explicit instruction respectively. “For the simple rule, there was no significant difference between an explicit, teacher directed-instructional approach and an implicit, grammar-discovery approach” (Andrews 2007). However, for the complex rule, the explicit treatment groups showed significantly higher learning. It was suggested that teachers could spend the limited grammar-teaching time on complex structures and allowed the students to induct the simple rules themselves. Andrews (2007) remarked that this study brought to light that in an academic purpose class, especially for adult learners who can tap into L1 linguistic knowledge and cognitively process new second language (L2) forms during a presentation, an explicit approach can be considered especially for complex structures.

The grammatical errors in English essay writing among rural Malay Secondary school students in Malaysia were studied by Maros et al. (2007). The study showed that despite 6 years of learning English, the learners still had difficulty in using the correct English grammar in their writing reflected in three most frequent errors, namely, use of articles, SVA and copula “be”. A large number of these errors were due to the Malay mother tongue interference. It was suggested that “remedial measures should be taken to implement approaches that could best assist students in these problematic areas” (Maros et al. 2007).

The objectives of this study are firstly, to explore SVA errors made by English for Academic Purpose (EAP) learners in their writing, and, secondly, to investigate how overt teaching has improved their grammatical competence which in turn improves their quality of writing. This study supports the claim that the quality of a piece of writing is often evaluated by the number of errors; grammatical or otherwise, that general readers see in it (Tan, 2005).

## 2. Methodology

This study involved 39 second year learners from a public university in Malaysia pursuing a three-year diploma programme. This sample size was from two different faculties, that is, the first group of nineteen students was from the Faculty of Business Studies while the other group of twenty students was from the Faculty of Accountancy. These two groups of students were chosen as the sample of this study because they had been studying together in their respective groups for the past one year, that is, two semesters. As such, they had been exposed to a similar methodology of teaching English, similar materials used by the lecturers and the same number of contact hours. This was to ensure that both groups were as similar as possible in terms of exposure to the English Language prior to the study. On top of that, these two groups of learners were taking for their first time a writing course in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) which equipped them with the necessary writing skills for completing their reports and dissertations but nevertheless, required them to have already attained an advanced proficiency level of the English language. These subjects had spent their first two semesters, that is, their first year studying proficiency-level English. They were taking the six-hour weekly EAP course taught by the two researchers when the data was collected. The ages of the sample ranged between 21 to 25 years and all of them were *Bumiputeras*, the native people of Malaysia. English was the third language to all of them after their mother tongue and *Bahasa Malaysia*, the national language of Malaysia. All these subjects have spent

more than a decade studying the English language in schools. English was taught using the implicit way as the emphasis was on functional and conversational English.

Data for this study was collected using a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test data was analysed to determine the types and frequency of SVA errors the subjects made in their writing. The post-test data was also analysed to determine the types and frequency of the SVA errors made after treatment of overt teaching of the targeted grammatical item, that is, SVA. Comparison was made between the results of the two tests in order to determine how overt teaching had affected the number of SVA errors made in their writing before and after the treatment.

During the pre-test, the subjects were given two pieces of reading materials of about 2,000 words on a contemporary discussive topic which the subjects were familiar with. After that, they were asked to produce a 350-word essay on the topic in one and a half hours. The subjects were advised to obtain points for their essays from the reading materials provided even though they were not limited to any number of points to include in their writing. Their essays were collected and then the SVA errors in each essay were highlighted and classified using a 2-step classification of learners' SVA errors in writing, which was an adaption of Ho's (2005) 3-step approach to errors in students' writing. According to Ho (2005:1) learners' mistakes are "systematic" and this allowed them to be classified. This 2-step approach in Table 1 identified the occurrences of the SVA errors and then each occurrence was classified according to the different SVA forms.

After identification and classification of the SVA errors in the pre-test were made, the researchers highlighted and targeted the SVA forms where the subjects had the most errors. These forms were later taught to the subjects by the two researchers. This form of teaching or treatment by way of explicit teaching was carried out over a period of two weeks comprising three sessions with each session lasting two hours. Therefore, the subjects spent a total of six hours learning the targeted SVA rules explicitly. SVA rules were explained to the subjects followed by written exercises and error correction of sample writing collected from the subjects. Wang (2008) pointed out that "teacher correction can be beneficial when errors are repeatedly made by most students". Attention was drawn to errors made in SVA and explicit explanation was given to explain why the errors occurred with reference being made to the targeted SVA grammatical rules. This form of explicit correction of the subjects' errors in SVA is similar to one of the six types of teachers' corrective feedback identified by Lyster and Ranta (as cited in Yoshida, 2008) which may prove to be effective in helping learners' internalize the target forms.

After this treatment, the post-test was conducted. The rubrics of the post-test was similar to that of the pre-test with the subjects being given another set of two reading materials of about 2,000 words on a contemporary topic which they were familiar with. After reading the materials, they were instructed to write another discussive writing based on a given topic which was related to the reading materials. The subjects were also given one and a half hours to complete their 350-word essays. Data from this post-test was analysed using the same method as data from the pre-test, that is, the targeted SVA errors were highlighted, and then categorised using the 2-step classification of learners' SVA errors in writing.

After that, data from the two tests were compared to determine if the use of overt teaching had any significant effects on the subjects' understanding and usage of the targeted forms of SVA forms in their writing.

### 3. Results and discussion

Good writing involves not only skills in the area of content, organisation or style but also the ability to produce a grammatically error-free piece of work as surface errors distract readers. According to Maxwell and Meiser (1997), SVA errors are common sentence-errors that cause learners problems in writing. Therefore, learners have to ensure that their writing is grammatically accurate. This is especially true in the case of these EAP subjects who must be equipped with the basics of writing error-free grammatically correct sentences which will not mar or distort the meaning of their writing.

"Feedback is of utmost importance to the writing process. Without individual attention and sufficient feedback on errors, improvement will not take place. We must accept the fact that L2 writing contains errors; it is our responsibility to help learners to develop strategies for self-correction and regulation. Indeed, L2 writers require and expect specific overt feedback from teachers not only on content but also on the form and structure of writing. If this feedback is not part of the instructional process, then students will be disadvantaged in improving both writing and language skills" (Myles, 2002).

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for the researchers to provide feedback on the students' common SVA errors in order to improve their language skills and enhance their writing.

The data collected in the pre-test showed the subjects making gross SVA errors especially in the following five types of SVA forms as listed in Table 2. Of all these five types of SVA errors presented in Figure 1, the type of SVA forms where the subjects violated the SVA rule the most number of times, that is 141 times, was SVA error form 1 which requires a verb to agree with its subject. The subjects either omitted the *-s/-es/-ies* inflection for the third person singular verbs

such as “he mention...”, “he want...” and “she check...” or they added ~s to the plural subjects such as “they needs...” and “they likes...”. For the subjects to use this form correctly, their third person singular must agree with its verb by taking the ~s inflection such as “...she says...”, and the plural cannot take any ~s inflection for the verb such as “...we check...”.

Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman (1983) identified this problem on the omission of the third person singular inflection as one of the four problems on SVA forms in their checklist of troublesome cases (1999). Meanwhile, Pilleux (2003) rationalised that learners sometimes commit this type of errors when they omit the ~s inflection from the third person singular verb in their attempt to make the verb agree with the singular subject like the subjects in this study using “he make...” and “it seem...”. Alternatively, they also overuse the ~s inflection as plural marking by trying to “pluralise” the verbs by adding the ~s inflections to make them agree with the plural subjects such as “we starts...” and “they likes...”.

In English, it is a mandatory rule that the verb must agree with the subject. A singular subject takes a singular verb whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb. Take for instance, the third person pronouns such as “he, she and it” take a singular verb with the ~s inflection as in “The boy//He/She/It eats”. On the other hand, the plural subjects and pronouns such as “I, We, You and They” take the stem form of the verbs. The conditions for using the third person singular ~s/~es/~ies inflection are complicated because learners have to simultaneously identify the relevant contexts for number distinctions and manipulate the elements that affect the number agreement relationship.

Dan (2007) found that intralingual errors still play a significant role in students’ writing due to students’ poor command of grammar structures. First, the subject must be in a certain person and number and the predication has to be in a certain mood and tense. It is not easy to explain the rule, for example, if the lecturer tells the subject that the ~s/~es/~ies inflection is used in the verbs after the third person singular, this may be misleading. There are many instances when this is not so, for example, the use of questions that begins with “does”. The ~s/~es/~ies inflection precedes the subjects and the stem forms follow the subjects, for example, “Does he copy?” The main verbs that come after “does not” in the negative forms are also in the infinitive, for example, “He does not copy.” For the third person singular present tense that comes after the use of a modal auxiliary, the infinitive form is also used such as “She can write.” If lecturers give the wrong explanations or make contradictory statements, the learners may get even more confused. In English, there are many exceptions to the general rule such as the use in question and negative forms as well as its use after the modal verbs. In addition, the influence of the mother tongue and the national language which does not require any marking of person or number makes it difficult for the subjects to master the SVA forms in English. The findings in this study support George (1972),

“In practice, the stem+s” form gives a lot of trouble to teachers and learners in classes where the learner’s mother tongue does not have verb inflections. Though the learner experiences its occurrence very frequently and it is drilled to excess, its lack of significance often prevents its acceptance into the learner’s permanent memory store as a third person singular subject association.”

In the case of the subjects who speak mainly the Malay language which is the medium of instruction in Malaysia, there is no SVA form in the language, for example, “*Ali pergi ke pasar*” (Ali go to the market) and “*Mereka pergi ke pasar*” (They go to the market). The stem forms of the verbs are often used in all contexts regardless of tense or number. “Most Asian languages use the stem forms of nouns and verbs in all contexts so that both the inflections of English and the concepts behind them seem to convey redundant information” (George, 1972). This was further supported by Nair (1990) who stated, “In English, the insertion or non-insertion of ~s to show number in the verb structure is redundant. To the Malay student, this rule in English does not hinder his communicative ability to any large extent.” This explains why the subjects in this study made gross errors in their use of the SVA forms as during the process of writing, interference from the mother tongue or the national language which is the medium of instruction in schools, that is, the Malay language, affected how they used the SVA forms correctly.

It was noticed that the subjects often used the stem forms of the verbs in order to simplify the target language rules. This reduced the linguistic burden or learning load. The subjects used this simplification process that increased the generality of rules by extending their range of application and dropping rules of limited applicability. They tried to construct an optimum grammar, that is, grammar in which the fewest number of rules did the maximum amount of work. Thus, it is not surprising that most of them did not master SVA in English. The rule for the third person singular present tense in English is redundant and unnecessary for communication since it does not affect the meaning of the sentence if it is omitted. So, this rule is often not applied by ESL learners. Richards (1985) pointed out that overgeneralisation may be the result of the learners reducing their linguistic burden. With the omission of the third person ~s inflection, overgeneralisation removes the necessity for concord, thus relieving the “learner of considerable effort.” Duskova (1969) explains,

“since all grammatical persons take the same zero verbal ending except the third person singular in the present tense, which is the only verbal form with a distinctive verbal personal ending (apart from the anomalous “am”) omission of



the ~s in the third person singular may be accounted for by the heavy pressure for all the other endless forms”.

Wei (2008) pointed out that some learners may turn to learning strategies such as overgeneralisation, simplification, incomplete rule application and inadequate declarative knowledge of L2.

In addition, it was not easy for the subjects to master the use of the copula, the verb “be”. They made mistakes like “The lecturer are...”, “Plagiarism are...”, “Students is...” and “The problems is...” The “be” verb was often omitted and if it was used, it was not done correctly as is shown by the examples given. The verb “be” is difficult to use because it exists in eight different forms (am, is, are, was, were, be, been and being). Five of these forms do not resemble the stem form and it must agree in person, number and tense with the subject. Thus, many students are confused with its use as there are various conditions to be met to enable the appropriate forms to be used. For the verb “have”, it has three forms, “have, has and had”. “Have” is often inflected in the third person singular present tense and becomes “has” but this inflected form is often rejected for “have” which is the stem form. Ho (1973) pointed out that “lack of subject-verb agreement often involves forms of “be” and “have” functioning either as full or auxiliary verbs. This has been traced to the fact that both have irregular forms.” In the present study, the subjects came up with errors like, “Student have...” “It have...” and “They has...”

Here, the subjects also made numerous errors in the concord of number between subject and verb which according to Pilleux (2003), has been considered as the most important type of concord in English. The subject of the sentence determines the concord, and hence, the verb forms that allow a distinction between singular and plural forms are dependent on whether the subject is singular or plural. The subjects were unable to use this form of SVA correctly and they made errors such as “lecturer mark...”, “...student speak...”, “...students writes...” and “...people says...”. It is important for language teachers and lecturers to teach the use of the third person singular in the simple present tense. However, they must be aware of the danger of hypercorrection, for example, overemphasis and drilling intensively this usage may cause students to use it inappropriately in cases where it is incorrect to do so, for example the insertion of “~s/~es/~ies” to verbs after the plural pronouns or nouns, for example, “They goes to school by school bus.” and “The passengers likes to ride in his taxi.” (Wee, 1995). According to Wei (2008), “incorrect teaching method can prevent successful second language learning.” Therefore, the problematic areas need to be taught correctly to ensure students’ mastery of the correct forms. Wiener (1981) suggested that

“those who violate the system of agreement will require instruction in the differences between the ~s/~e/~ies inflection for the verb and for the noun, and will need to develop a sense of when to use the ~s inflection at the end of the verbs. A good syllabus provides instruction in subject-verb recognition so you have a foundation in key grammatical concepts upon which to build.”

The results of the study reveal that these subjects have learnt the targeted SVA rules after undergoing overt teaching as can be seen in Figure 2 (indicated by 1). Their post-test essays showed a very significant decrease in the number of SVA errors found in verbs that do not agree with the subject. In the pre-test, the subjects made 141 errors but after overt teaching of this SVA form, the subjects made only 48 errors in the post-test. Nevertheless, in comparison to the other SVA error forms, the subjects still had more errors in this form than the other SVA forms after overt teaching.

Obviously, overt teaching that has been given by the researchers has proven effective in reducing the number of errors made in their post-test essays as compared to errors of the same form in the pre-test. Similarly, Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001:55) discovered that “direct grammar teaching would result in more accurate language use”. This was based on their survey conducted on teachers of the English language who were prepared to teach the language in the communicative way but nevertheless also believed in the positive impact of teaching grammar directly. Loewen (as cited in Yoshida, 2008) who examined classroom studies on uptake of corrective feedback by teachers found that the learners responded positively to feedback provided by the teachers leading to more successful uptakes. Scott (2008) argued that language teachers are responsible to provide learners with feedback on their errors even though the level of the learners’ language uptake varied with different corrective feedback. He maintained that this form of explicit and intentional correction which required them to “retrieve the target language form” will benefit the learners. Gao (2009) pointed out that “focus on form is practical and effective in college English teaching and learning in improving the students and it should be applied in college English teaching and learning to improve students’ accuracy as well as fluency”. Figure 3 shows a comparison of the frequency of errors made by the subjects in their pre-test and post-test essays.

The SVA error form 2 on the use of “One of...” requires the verb to agree with its subject – subject word – and not with the subject that is near to it as in “One of the reasons is...” and “One of the students is...”. This form of errors appeared eight times in the subjects’ pre-test essays but after the overt treatment, they appeared only twice in the post-test. Biber et al. (1999) explained that based on the Principle of Proximity, there is a strong tendency for the verb to agree with the nearest noun or pronoun even if it is not the head of the subject noun phrase. Therefore, if we were to look at the subjects’ incorrect sentences such as “One of the students are ...” or “One of the factors are...”, there was the tendency to choose “are” to agree with the noun closest to it, that is, in this case, “students” and “factors”.

This rule of proximity also applies to the use of “either...or” and “neither...nor” as shown in the SVA errors form 3. There were three instances of the subjects making errors with the use of this form. Take for instance, the subjects’ errors in their pre-test: “Neither the junior students nor the senior student have...” and “Either the lecturer or the students checks...”. Both had SVA errors because their verbs should agree with the nearest subjects. However, after explicit teaching of this SVA form, the post-test did not record any errors of this nature any more.

Most of the subjects appeared to have prior knowledge of some forms of SVA as could be seen from the sentences they constructed in the pre-test although other SVA forms proved to be challenging for these subjects. This was where they made the most number of errors. The pre-test recorded thirteen errors in the use of determiners that needed a plural verb with countable subjects such as “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...” indicated as 4. The subjects either used a singular verb with plural subjects as in “All the students needs...” or a plural verb with uncountable subjects such as “All the information are...”. There were also 12 errors in the use of existential sentences as represented by 5. These sentences began with “There...” in the pre-test as could be seen in some of the subjects’ essays such as “There is a few solution...” and “There are information...”. In these cases, the verb which comes before the subject must be in agreement with it. Pilleux (2003) opined that phrases such as “a lot” and “lots of” in existential “there is...” or “there are...” could be problematic for some learners. However, it must be noted that after teaching these forms explicitly, the subjects’ post-test did not record any errors with the use of the determiners such as “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...”, whereas for the existential sentences, there was only one error recorded.

It is clear that overt teaching of grammatical structures has important pedagogical implications as it draws learners’ attention to the formal properties of the target language and helps them to perceive and understand features explained which will otherwise go unnoticed and unheeded. Learners who can notice and understand the targeted grammatical items can outperform those who are unable to do so. Grammar instruction makes learners realize their lack of competency and prevents fossilization in their learning. Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which learners tend to keep in their interlanguage (IL) regardless of their age or the amount of explanation or instruction they receive in the target language. Therefore, the teaching of grammar helps learners to modify their erroneous hypotheses and contribute to addition of new rules and confirmation of correct ones. (Paradowski, 2007). Selinker (as cited in Wang, 2008) described a learner’s language as an “‘interlanguage’ or a ‘between language’ which exhibits an increasing proximity to L2. The approximation of IL to L2 is dynamic, often fluctuating process, influenced by changes about and how to use L2, as well as transfer of and hypotheses based on L1 structure applied to L2”. Thus, in this study, we find the learners’ IL moving closer towards the target language. Paradowski (2007) stated that “explicit teaching of grammatical forms makes learners realize that they have not mastered the whole target language (TL) system and helps them stay open to the development and restructuring of their interlanguage. They are made to remember structures”. In addition, Paradowski (2007) pointed out that timely activities and corrections within explicit instruction enables learners to develop greater accuracy in the use of subsequent use of grammatical forms and structures. This is substantiated by this study which shows that the students made fewer errors in SVA after the overt teaching of these forms.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the findings above, it can be concluded that overt teaching of the five SVA forms has greatly benefitted the subjects. Comparison of the data from the subjects’ pre-test and post-test shows a drastic decrease in the frequency of errors in the targeted SVA error forms after overt teaching. It implies that the subjects had learnt the targeted SVA rules as they made improvements in the usage of these common SVA forms which made up the bulk of SVA forms in their essays. This has also improved the quality of their writing.

Teaching and learning can become intentional and purposeful with overt teaching when lecturers can explicitly focus on their learners’ weaknesses. Teachers and lecturers should realize that is their responsibility to give due focus on those areas that students face problems and need reinforcement. In the case of SVA, the language lecturer can explain the concept of singularity and plurality in nouns by pointing out the differences in sentences such as “The student copies.” and “The students copy.” This overt teaching will enable the students to understand the concept of SVA better. The lecturer also should make the students realise that there are plural nouns that do not end with the *~s/~e/~ies* inflection such as “children, mice, geese, teeth and feet.” Explanations should be given that plural nouns that end with the *~s/~e/~ies* inflections and those that do not do so require the stem-form verbs after them in the simple present tense. On the other hand, singular nouns are not inflected but they still require the *~s/~e/~ies* inflection for the verbs that come after them in the simple present tense. This concept of agreement has to be established in the students’ mind and they must realize that no matter how far the subject is separated from the verb, this rule of SVA must be applied.

The findings have led the researchers to conclude that overt teaching of problematic grammatical items be emphasized. It is recommended that teachers or lecturers identify the grammatical problems early in the semester so that any remedial work or explicit teaching can take place early. It is advisable for the teachers and lecturers to check their

students' prior knowledge of language structures so that they have an idea of the proficiency level of their students and know which areas to focus on.

Language input plays a prominent role in language acquisition so language teachers have to ensure that optimal input which learners can convert to intake is provided. Therefore, it is recommended that explicit grammar instruction with a focus on target language grammatical items be incorporated into the writing class. Overt corrective feedback can be given by supplying explicit explanation for the errors made. By drawing the learners' attention to the targeted grammatical items to be taught, the learners can acquire these items slowly which they can eventually apply to their writing. The reduction of gross grammatical errors made by learners inevitably improves the quality of writing.

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Table 1. 2-step Classification of Learners' SVA Errors in Writing

Identification of Errors	Classification of SVA Error Forms

Table 2. Classification of SVA Error Forms in Subjects' Writing

No.	Classification of SVA Error Forms
1	A verb agrees with the subject, and concord of number
2	A verb agrees with its subject –subject word- and not with the subject near it as in “One of...”
3	Subjects joined by “either...or” and “neither...nor”
4	Using a plural verb with a countable subject. “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of ...”, “Lots of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...”
5	A verb agrees with the subject when an existential sentence begins with the word “There...”,.

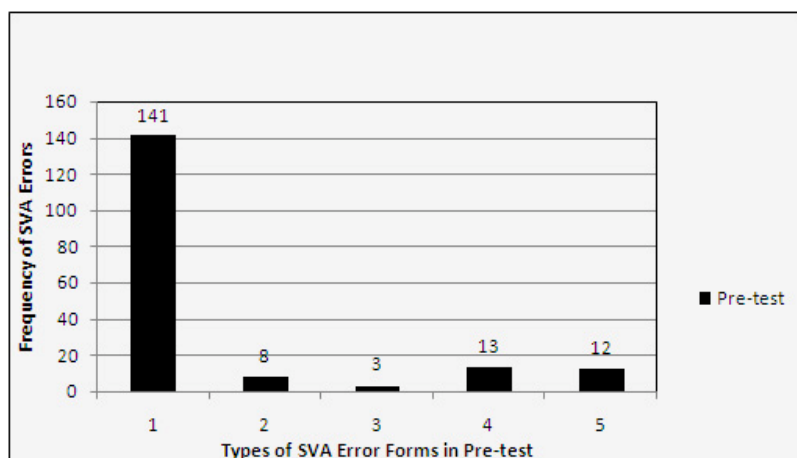


Figure 1. Frequencies and Types of Subjects' SVA Errors in the Pre-test

Legend:

- 1: A verb agrees with the subject, and concord of number
- 2: The verb agrees with its subject –subject word- and not with the subject near it as in “One of...”
- 3: Subjects joined by “either ...or...” and “neither...nor...”
- 4: Determiners that use a plural verb with countable subjects such as “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...”.
- 5: A verb agrees with the subject when an existential sentence begins with “There...”, The subject comes after the verb.

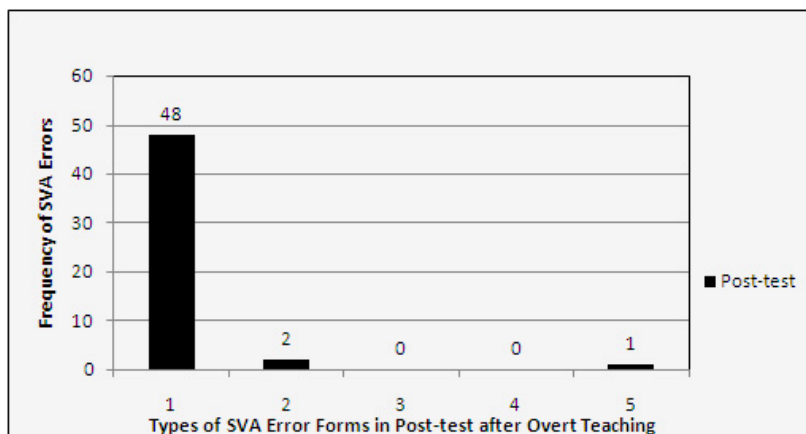


Figure 2. Frequencies and Types of Subjects' SVA Errors in the Post-test

Legend:

- 1: A verb agrees with the subject, and concord of number
- 2: The verb agrees with its subject –subject word- and not with the subject near it as in “One of...”
- 3: Subjects joined by “either ...or...” and “neither...nor...”
- 4: Determiners that use a plural verb with countable subjects such as “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...”.
- 5: A verb agrees with the subject when an existential sentence begins with “There...”, The subject comes after the verb.

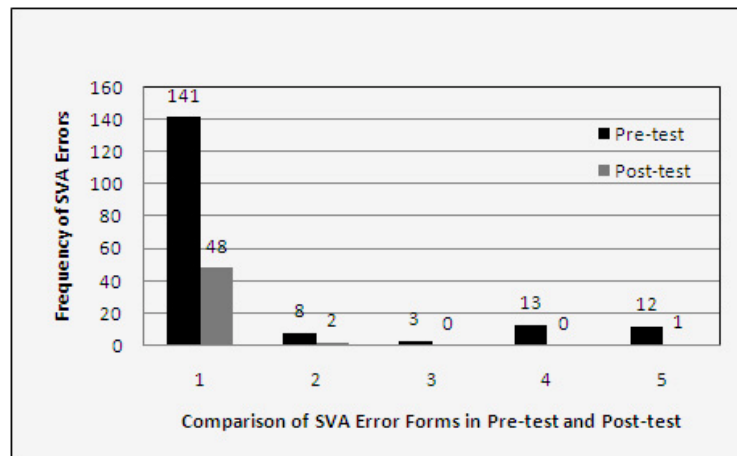


Figure 3. Comparison of Frequencies and Types of Subjects' SVA Errors in the Pre-test and Post-test after Overt Teaching

Legend:

- 1: A verb agrees with the subject, and concord of number
- 2: The verb agrees with its subject –subject word- and not with the subject near it as in “One of...”
- 3: Subjects joined by “either ...or...” and “neither...nor...”
- 4: Determiners that use a plural verb with countable subjects such as “All...”, “Some...”, “A lot of...”, “The majority...”, “Plenty of...”, “Many of...” and “Half of...”.
- 5: A verb agrees with the subject when an existential sentence begins with “There...”, The subject comes after the verb.



## An Experimental Study on the Effects of Different Reading Tasks on L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

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### Abstract

This empirical study was undertaken to test the Involvement Load Hypothesis (Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001) by examining the impact of three tasks on vocabulary acquisition. It was designed to test and develop the involvement load hypothesis by examining the impact of different reading tasks on the L2 vocabulary acquisition. The results show that reading tasks could facilitate L2 vocabulary acquisition. The hypothesis is basically supported, but it is expected that it will be further improved and needs some modifications. Furthermore, the results also indicate that using new words in contextualized communication is an efficient means to extend and consolidate learners' vocabulary acquisition.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary acquisition, Task involvement load, Tasks, Reading

### 1. Introduction

The study of vocabulary is at the heart of language teaching in terms of organization of syllabuses, the evaluation of learner performance, and the provision of acquisition resources (Candlin, 1988). Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition is crucial to students' traditional language skills: reading, writing, and listening. Without enough vocabulary, listening, reading comprehension, and writing are inefficient. Besides, "without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilson, 1986). So vocabulary is essential to language acquisition.

With enhancement of the status of vocabulary in language learning, research into vocabulary acquisition becomes a focus of research at present. Instructors and learners have always tried to find out ways in which instructional programs might best foster the acquisition of vocabulary. This study set out to examine the effect of reading-based tasks on vocabulary acquisition. Nearly 152 freshmen non-English majors from Jiangsu University participated in the study. Based on the results of vocabulary tests, this study aimed to find answers to the four questions surveyed in this study.

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Vocabulary acquisition

There are different pairs of modes on vocabulary learning. In this thesis, we will use the term 'incidental vocabulary acquisition' discussed in Eysenck (1982) as one of our theoretical foundation. Incidental vocabulary learning in our research means that learners are required to finish a task involving the processing of some unfamiliar words without being told in advance that they will be tested afterwards on their recall of the meanings of those novel words. It is different from implicit vocabulary learning which holds that the meaning of a new word is acquired totally unconsciously as a result of abstraction from repeated exposure in a range of activated contexts. Implicit learning can be incidental only, but incidental vocabulary learning can include both implicit and explicit learning since "linking word form to word meaning is an explicit learning which holds that there is some benefit to vocabulary acquisition from the learner noticing novel vocabulary, selectively attending to it, and using a variety of strategies to try to infer its meaning from the context" (Ellis, 1994: 219). We also cannot say vocabulary learning here is an indirect learning since we have vocabulary exercises in our reading tasks including guessing words from context and using target words to make sentences which belong to vocabulary learning. The controlled experiments in the present study aim at investigating the effects of varying reading tasks on learners' vocabulary retention. Therefore, the term incidental learning is used as an opposing concept of intentional learning. The subjects in this study are required to read the passages with an intention to understand them and answer some comprehension questions but not with an intention to learn the target words. It is in this sense that learning of the target words is incidental.

Although the learners acquire vocabulary incidentally through reading, they also need to process the unfamiliar words in order to understand the contents of the passages. What do we know about the processes that facilitates vocabulary learning? Then another theoretical foundation of the current study is the depth of processing model which is launched by Craik and Lockhart (1972). However, some researchers (Baddeley, 1978; Eysenck, 1978, 1977) have challenged their levels of processing theory. The main points focus on the following two questions: (1) What exactly constitutes a

level of processing, and (2) How do we know that one level is deeper than another. In 2001, Laufer and Hulstijn present the Involvement load hypothesis which firstly adopts the measurable and operational factors (need, search, evaluation) to define the involvement loads which are used to judge the different degree of processing the unfamiliar vocabulary through reading. We have this empirical study designed exactly on the theoretical basis of the Involvement Load Hypothesis and use the measurable criteria of three components to define three different reading tasks.

### *2.2 The Involvement Load Hypothesis*

Laufer & Hulstijn (2001) proposed the Involvement Load Hypothesis which was a motivational-cognitive construct of involvement, consisting of three basic components: need, search, and evaluation. Retention of unfamiliar words was claimed to be conditional upon the amount of involvement while processing these words. Involvement was operationalised by tasks designed to vary in the degree of need, search and evaluation.

The need component was the motivational, non-cognitive dimension of involvement. It was concerned with the need to achieve. This notion here was not interpreted in its negative sense, based on fear of failure, but in its positive sense based on a drive to comply with the task requirements which could be either externally imposed or self-imposed. Need was moderate when it was imposed by an external agent, e.g. the need to use a word in a sentence which the teacher has asked the learner to produce and need was strong when imposed on the learner by him-or herself. In the case of need, moderate and strong subsume different degrees of drive.

Search and evaluation were the two cognitive (information processing) dimensions of involvement, contingent upon noticing and deliberately allocating attention to the form-meaning relationship (Schmidt, 2001). Search was the attempt to find the meaning of unknown L2 word or trying to find the L2 word form expressing a concept by consulting a dictionary or another authority (e.g. a teacher).

Evaluation entailed a comparison of a given word with other words, a specific meaning of a word with its other meanings, or combining the word with other words in order to assess whether a word (i.e. a form-meaning pair) did or did not fit its context.

Each of the above three factors could be absent or present when processing a word in a naturally or artificially designed task. The combination of factors with their degrees of prominence constituted the involvement load, i.e., the three components involved in the tasks would be used to count the number of the involvement index which indicated the different degrees of involvement loads. Retention of unfamiliar words was claimed to be conditional upon the amount of involvement while processing these words (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research questions*

The present study attempts to investigate the immediate and delayed effects of reading-based tasks on vocabulary acquisition as follows:

1. What are the overall immediate effects of different reading tasks on vocabulary acquisition?
  - a. What are the overall immediate effects of different tasks on vocabulary acquisition?
  - b. What are the immediate tasks effects on acquisition of different word knowledge types?
2. What are the delayed effects of different reading-based tasks on vocabulary acquisition?
  - a. What are the overall delayed effects of different tasks on vocabulary acquisition?
  - b. What are the delayed task effects on acquisition of different word knowledge types?
3. Can tasks contribute to vocabulary acquisition through reading by Chinese English learners?
4. With need and search controlled, does evaluation hold significant correlation with acquisition of the target words?

### *3.2 Subjects*

The subjects were 152 freshmen who have been learning English as a second language from Jiangsu University. They were from three intact College English classes, of which two were at the high level and the other one class was at the low level. Placement at these levels was determined by the means of the English proficiency test that was administered upon students' entering the university.

### *3.3 Instruments*

The instruments used in this study can be illustrated as follows

**(1). Task 1.** The reading material used for the study was a 930-word enjoyable, clearly organized article entitled "Why We Love Who We Love." The text was used in a pilot study with the students at similar levels. The findings from the pilot study showed the text as suitable in terms of content and difficulty level.



(2). **Task 2.** Three reading tasks were selected with different involvement loads to test their effects on vocabulary acquisition. Each task was randomly assigned to one of the three experimental groups. These tasks consisted of the multi-choice comprehension questions (Task M), blank-filling task (Task B) as well as sentence-making task (Task S).

(3). **Task 3.** To assess the immediate and delayed effects of the tasks on vocabulary acquisition, two vocabulary tests were administered: an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest. These tests were composed of supply-spelling, matching as well as select-definition.

(4). **Task 4.** The subjects were required to write a composition using the target words whose meaning had been glossed in the reading passages after each reading. But while writing the composition, they were not required to pay much attention to the grammar.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The present researcher scored the vocabulary tests after each task correct answer received one point, a semantically approximate explanation or translation received half a point, and a word that was not glossed (either in English or Chinese) or a blank received no points. The maximum grade a student could receive was 30 if all the words were correctly explained. If an answer was controversial in terms of the degree of the semantic approximation, opinions of the researcher's colleagues were sought for the scoring of this item.

Data collection is also from the qualitative study. The instrument involved in this part was group interviews. The interview with each group was conducted in the language lab. They were asked to reflect on the process in which they completed the tasks. And then, they were required to explain their performances in the vocabulary tests, that is, how they came up with the answers in the tests. And meanwhile, the subjects were expected to explain why they responded to the survey questions in a particular way in the questionnaire.

The procedure of the interview was conducted as follows: the interview was conducted in two sessions; one was at the end of the immediate posttest, the other at the end of the delayed posttest. For each session, the researcher interviewed the subjects individually. Chinese was used in the interviews so that the subjects could express their views freely and clearly. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later for further analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

(1). **Scoring.** Scoring is based on the matter of counting the correct answers on the reading- based tasks and vocabulary tests. The same scoring system was used for the pretest and posttest,

(2). **One-way ANOVA.** ANOVA was performed on the immediate posttest, the delayed posttest and responses to the questionnaire respectively.

(3). **Paired-samples t-test.** The paired-samples t-test was performed on the two vocabulary test scores achieved by each of the three groups.

(4). **Qualitative data analysis.** After the interview data were transcribed, the main points in the data were analyzed and summarized to help interpret the findings of the statistical analysis. The interviewees recalling process, for example, was analyzed to sort out the information about what word knowledge types the students paid attention to while performing the tasks and why they behaved in a particular way in the tests.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1 Immediate effects

This section consists of comparing the scores on the immediate posttest as a whole among the three groups as well as the scores on the part of the immediate posttest.

#### 4.1.1 The overall immediate effects

To determine whether there was any overall difference among the treatment groups in the immediate posttest, the researcher performed one-way ANOVA by using the immediate posttest scores. Table 4.1 displays the results.

#### Insert Table 4.1 here!

The table shows that all the three groups manifested high levels of retention, varying from 55.87 to 73.65, which suggests that reading-based tasks did efficiently facilitate lexical learning. The retention rate, however, was significantly different for the three groups:  $F = 30.732$ ,  $p = .000$ . Given the fact that the three groups had the same conditions except the tasks, we may attribute the marked difference to the tasks, which vary in involvement loads. In other words, task-induced involvement loads did have a significant immediate effect on vocabulary retention. Furthermore, a post hoc Scheffe test indicates that both Groups B and S scored significantly higher than Group M ( $p = .000$  in either case, see Table 4.2) but did not differ remarkably from each other as expected; rather, the former scored slightly higher than the latter.

#### Insert Table 4.2 here!

These findings partially support the Involvement Load Hypothesis, which predicted that Tasks B and S which induced a higher involvement load than Task M would be more effective for vocabulary retention. The results also corroborate Hulstijn and Laufer's findings in their Hebrew-English experiment (2001), in which "reading plus fill in" and writing tasks outperformed the comprehension task in the acquisition of the target words. Furthermore, the findings also seem to support Swain's output hypothesis (Swain, 1985, 1995), given that the difference between Tasks B and S and Task M in this study was actually the one between pushed output and comprehension because the former required students to infer the word meanings and use them, whereas the latter involved only the understanding of the target words.

Retrospective interviews with the task performers and the questionnaire data also provided explanations for this phenomenon. When asked how they had processed the target words while performing the tasks, Task M performers reflected that they focused mainly on word meanings and even if they sometimes paid attention to other aspects of word knowledge such as word class and word form, the purpose was still to get some clues for the inference of meanings. One interviewee said,

*I mostly thought about meanings while performing the task. I cared little about the word spelling, its part of speech and context. Even though sometimes I paid attention to these aspects, it was mainly for the sake of inferring lexical meanings.*

*Task B and Task S performers, however, reflected that in order to complete the tasks, they had to pay careful attention to many aspects of word knowledge such as meanings, word classes and collocations, as one interviewee reported,*

*To use the word, I should know its meaning. Besides, I also paid particular attention to how it was used in the passage such as its part of speech and the words with which it appeared together.*

Clearly, Tasks S and B performers attended to more aspects of word knowledge than Task M performers. According to many linguists and psychologists, processing new lexical information more elaborately (e.g., by paying careful attention to the word's pronunciation, orthography, grammatical category, meaning, and semantic relations to other words) will lead to higher retention than processing lexical information less elaborately (e.g., by paying attention to only one or two of these dimensions). Accordingly, we may conclude that more elaborate processing reduced by Tasks S and B leads to their superiority in the immediate posttest.

However, out of our expectations, the results reveal no significant differences between Tasks S and B although the former induced a higher involvement load than the latter. On the contrary, Task B yielded slightly higher retention than Task S. This finding runs counter to the Involvement Load Hypothesis and also contradicts those obtained by Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) who found remarkable differences between the tasks with moderate and strong evaluation. The reasons for this divergence can be various. One possible explanation is that the time control for the two tasks is different in the two studies. In this study, time on task was kept identical. In Hulstijn and Laufer's study, however, time on task varied. "Reading plus fill in" performers spent 50-55 minutes on their task whereas "composition writing" performers 70-80 minutes. Clearly, the latter spent much more time than the former and this may contribute to the obvious advantage of writing task over "reading plus fill in" task in their study.

Another possible interpretation is that the measures adopted to examine the task effect are different in the two investigations. In this study, the researcher investigated on three aspects of word knowledge to explore the task value for vocabulary retention. In their study, however, Hulstijn and Laufer only examined the task effect on one aspect of lexical knowledge, namely meaning. The difference in measures may also bring forth different results.

Last but not least, it is also possible that Task S performers did not approach the task in the way the researcher had expected. Instead of the anticipated mental effort exerted in integrating new information with acquired knowledge, some students just simply imitated the sentences in the passage without giving too much thought. One of the interviewees from Group S said:

*Although I was not quite sure about the meanings of the words, it was not difficult for me to compose sentences. On the whole, I made sentences by imitating the example patterns in the original text. The target words and their collocations were also used in the similar way as in the passage. I just simply changed some other words in the given sentences.*

#### 4.1.2 Immediate effects on the retention of different word knowledge types

To further explore the immediate task effects on the retention of different word knowledge types, the scores on the three parts were displayed and compared among the three groups respectively. The results were summed up in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

**Spelling.** Table 4.3 shows that in terms of spelling, Group B scored higher than Group S, which in turn, scored noticeably higher than Group M. The difference among the three groups reached a significant level ( $F = 54.882$ ,  $p = .000$ ), suggesting that the tasks had a great impact on the students' recall of word spellings. A post hoc Scheffe (see Table 4.4) further indicates that both Groups B and S outscored Group M significantly, but they did not differ markedly from each other,  $p = .094$ . This means that Task B was slightly more conducive than Task S in prompting spelling retention and

both of them were significantly more effective than Task M in this respect. These findings partially support the involvement Load Hypothesis.

**Insert Table 4.3 and 4.4 here!**

The obvious superiority of Groups B and S over Group M in spelling may be due to two reasons. First, the higher involvement load induced by Tasks B and S may possibly push the students to process the lexical information with more mental efforts and this may facilitate the retention of word spellings. The follow-up interviews with Task B and S performers confirmed this speculation, as one interviewee explained:

*I paid little attention to the spellings of the words because they were all listed on the exercise paper, what I paid attention to were, actually, the meanings of the words, their parts of speech and collocations. During the test, however, I was surprised to find that I could retrieve the spellings of most of the words. This was mainly due to the painstaking efforts I had exerted on them and the deep impression they left on me. Consequently, I could spell out the words without much difficulty in the test.*

Secondly, while Task M only required the students to make their choice from the given options, Tasks B and S provided the students a chance to write the words. Clearly, this may also contribute to the superiority of these two tasks in the spelling measure.

As to the question why Task B yielded higher retention in spelling than Task S although it induced a lower involvement load, the interviews with the students may provide the possible explanation. Some interviewees who performed Task B explained that in order to put the target words into the appropriate given contexts, they studied and compared these words again and again, thus having a deep impression of them. Task S performers, however, explained that after inferring the word meanings, they exerted much effort in making the decision about additional words that could combine with these new words in the original sentences, and hence less attention was paid to the forms of these new words. This being the reason, we may possibly conclude that Task B could facilitate the retention of spellings more efficiently than Task S.

**Collocation.** The task effect on the collocation retention patterned similarly to that on spelling retention with the exception of the advantage of Task S over Task B. ANOVA results again reveal that there was a marked difference among the three groups, indicating that the tasks also played a significantly different role in facilitating the retention of collocation. Also, the post hoc Scheffe again indicates that both Groups B and S outscored Group M significantly. However, no marked difference was found between Groups S and B although the former did slightly better than the latter. This means that of the three tasks, Task S was the most beneficial to developing collocation knowledge, Task M the least and Task B in between. Both Tasks S and B differed from Task M significantly in this respect.

These findings partially confirm the Involvement Load Hypothesis. They are also consistent with Swain's output hypothesis (1985, 1995). Given that Tasks B and S were both output tasks, whereas Task M was an input task. According to Swain, using the language, as opposed to simply comprehending the language, may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing (1985: 249). Hence the advantage of Tasks B and S over Task M in the collocation measure may attribute to their ability to push the students to pay more attention to form (collocation, in this case).

Another aspect of the findings that may deserve due attention is that the contrast between Tasks B and S in the retention of collocation was not as acute as had been expected. One possible explanation is that Task S was not demanding enough to produce a superior result than Task B, as discussed earlier. An alternative interpretation is that Task B could also direct learners' attention to word collocations. As mentioned above, more than 60% of Task B students responded they had paid attention to collocations. Although this percentage was lower than that of Task S performer (72.2%), the difference was rather small ( $p = .362$ ).

**Meaning.** A different picture emerges for the task effect on the retention of word meanings. In contrast to the Involvement Load Hypothesis, the current findings did not show any significant differences among the three groups in the meaning measure; rather the difference was quite small ( $F = .032$ ,  $p = .969$ ).

In trying to account for the discrepancy with Hulstijn and Laufer, several potential explanations present themselves. First, the contrast in findings may be due to time on task, as mentioned earlier. A second explanation could be the different measures used to assess the meaning retention. While Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) seemed to be testing for productive knowledge of the words by asking students to produce translations of the target items, the researcher was more interested in detecting the receptive retention of meanings by adopting the multiple-choice test. The third possible explanation could be that most of the students, whichever task they performed, processed the meaning aspect of the target words deeply because all of the tasks were mainly meaning-driven. This speculation is supported by the findings obtained from the questionnaire and interview data. The questionnaire results indicate that in each group, more than 92% of the students reported their attention to the lexical meanings.

To sum up, the findings partially support the Involvement Load Hypothesis, in that Tasks B and S yielded significantly higher retention than Task M in the overall immediate posttest as well as the spelling and collocation measures but they did not differ significantly. Furthermore, the three tasks showed no marked differences in their immediate effects on meaning retention.

#### 4.2 Delayed effects

This section will report and discuss the findings of the delayed effects of the tasks on vocabulary retention.

##### 4.2.1 The overall delayed effects

To investigate whether there was any overall difference among the three groups in the delayed posttest, one-way ANOVA was performed using the delayed post-test scores.

##### **Insert Table 4.5 and 4.6 here!**

Table 4.5 showed that Group S scored the highest in the delayed posttest, Group M the lowest and Group B in between. The difference among them had reached a significant level ( $F = 6.277$ ,  $p = .002$ ), indicating that the tasks still had a great influence on vocabulary retention in spite of time. The post hoc Scheffe (see Table 4.6) further reveals a marked difference between Groups M and S (54.315 vs. 62.833,  $p = .002$ ). However, no significant difference was observed between Groups M and B or between Groups B and S. This means that of the three tasks, Task S was the most effective in facilitating long-term retention and its effectiveness was considerably superior to that of Task M whereas Task B was more conducive than Task M but not significantly conducive.

These findings only support the Involvement Load Hypothesis to a limited degree. That is, Task S still kept its superiority over Task M as time went by, suggesting that Task S could not only help the students to produce more words immediately after the treatment, but also allow them to store more of these words in their long-term memory. This result is also consistent with that obtained by Hulstijn and Laufer in their two parallel experiments (2001).

However, contrary to expectations, Task B lost its obvious advantage over Task M in the delayed posttest (58.519 vs. 54.315,  $p = .202$ ). We may explain this phenomenon from the perspective of generative model (Slamecka & Graf, 1978). Task B performers, unlike their Task S counterparts, were not required to generate. That is, they were not asked to use the target words in original contexts; rather they reacted to experimenter-provided stimuli, merely recognizing the differences among the words and put them into the given contexts. Probably, this kind of learning would efficiently facilitate immediate word gain. However, its positive effect would drop dramatically over time.

##### 4.2.2 Delayed effects on the retention of different word knowledge types

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 sum up the task's effect on the students' performances in different parts of the delayed posttest.

##### **Insert Table 4.7 and 4.8 here!**

**Spelling.** With regard to word spellings, Group S scored the highest, Group B lower and Group M the lowest. The differences among them reached a statistically significant level ( $F = 9.233$ ,  $p = .000$ ), implying that such differences were not due to chance. A post hoc Scheffe test (see Table 4.8) shows that Group S differed from Group M significantly (14.042 vs. 9.241,  $p = .000$ ). No marked difference, however, existed between Groups B and M, or between Groups B and S. These results mean that Task S was the most beneficial to long-term retention of word spellings whereas Task B failed to sustain its significant superiority over Task M.

**Collocation.** The delayed task effects on collocation retention resembled those on spelling retention. Specifically, there was a significant task effect on collocation, measure ( $F = 5.159$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Again, the post hoc Scheffe indicates that Task S performers outperformed Task M performers significantly (18.208 vs. 14.482,  $p = .006$ ). Still, no marked difference was found between Tasks B and M or between Tasks B and S. Clearly, Task S again proved the most effective in promoting collocation retention. The questionnaire results reflected that the students also held the most positive attitudes towards the effectiveness of Task S in collocation measure.

**Meaning.** A different picture appears in the case of the delayed task effects on meaning retention. No significant difference was found among the three groups; instead most of the students demonstrated a high level of retention in recognizing word meanings, which implies that the three tasks had similar delayed effects on the receptive retention of word meanings.

Generalizing from the above results, we may conclude that in terms of the delayed task effects on vocabulary retention, this study only provided limited support for the Involvement Load Hypothesis. That is, Task S still enjoyed its significant superiority over Task M in promoting the overall retention and retention of word spellings and collocations one week later. However, Task B did not yield significantly higher retention than Task M as predicted. No marked difference existed between Tasks S and B either.

#### 4.3 Different tasks contributing to vocabulary acquisition through reading

Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) hold that task with a higher involvement load will be more effective than task with a lower involvement load in terms of vocabulary retention. In the study, it was also predicted that if other factors being equal, tasks with a higher involvement load will be more effective for vocabulary acquisition than tasks with lower involvement load. The aim is to test whether this assumption can apply to Chinese learners of English or not.

##### **Insert Table 4.9 here!**

From Table 4.9, we can see that in the immediate test, the highest mean score among these four tasks is that of the reading and composition group, which was 16.32. So in the immediate test, the performance in the reading and composition group was higher than that in the reading and filling group and reading and guessing group, which, in turn, was higher than that in the reading and comprehension group. And a significant task effect between groups ( $F=15.615$ ,  $p=.000<.05$ ) was obtained. The results proved that in the immediate test Task 4 (reading and composition) with higher involvement load promoted better word acquisition than Task 1, 2, and 3.

In the same way, Table 4. 9 shows that in the delayed test, the highest mean score is task 4. And there was also a significant group difference ( $F=16.345$ ,  $p=.000<.05$ ). The results support Involvement Load Hypothesis that tasks with a higher involvement load will be more effective than tasks with a lower involvement load in terms of vocabulary retention.

Task 2 and Task 3 have the same involvement load index, but do they equal in vocabulary retention? Or is one task superior to the other in the immediate test or in the delayed test? To see whether the difference between mean retention scores of Task 2 and Task 3 was statistically significant, the mean scores in the two experiments in the immediate test and delayed test were then submitted to a t-test for Independent Samples (shown in Table 4. 10).

##### **Insert Table 4.10 here!**

The results revealed in the immediate test showed that the difference between Task 2 and Task 3 was significant ( $p=.014<.05$ ). It is unexpected that Task 2 had better acquisition of vocabulary in the immediate test. In the delayed test, there was no statistic significance between them. Drawing on the mean retention scores in Table 4-9, it appears that the group performing Task 2 got significantly better scores than the group doing Task 3. But in the delayed test, although the mean retention score of Task 4 (9.49) is higher than that of Task 3 (8.3), the difference was not statistically significant. The reason might lie in that the participants in the reading and guessing meaning group just guess meaning of the thirty target words when they did the task, but after collecting back the materials, they didn't pay attention to check the correct meaning of the target words when the teacher delivered the translation list of the target words

Therefore, tasks with higher involvement load generally but not necessarily lead to better retention. Task 4 with the highest involvement load resulted in the best retention result. As for Task 2 and Task 3 with the same involvement load, although there is statistically significant difference between them in the immediate test, the overwhelming gains of Task 2 disappeared in the delayed test.

#### 4.4 Different tasks having different effects on vocabulary acquisition

It was predicted that in the same task, with need and search controlled, tasks with higher evaluation will produce better retention than those with lower evaluation.

From Table 4-9, we know that L2 learners could gain the knowledge of the target words by incidental learning and reading tasks could facilitate vocabulary acquisition. However, different tasks have different effects on vocabulary acquisition.

First, in order to determine whether there was statistically significant effect of each factor, the mean retention scores of the immediate test and the delayed test were then submitted to One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) respectively. The ANOVA results of the immediate posttest are listed in Table 4-11 and the ANOVA results of the delayed posttest in Table 4-12.

##### **Insert Table 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13 here!**

The figures in Table 4. 6 show that in the immediate test the mean difference of Task 2 (reading and composition) and Task 4 (reading and blank-filling group) is 2.13, the difference is insignificant ( $p=.949>.05$ ). But both the mean differences between Task 1 and Task 2, Task 1 and Task 4 are 8.35, 6.22 respectively and the significance levels are 0.000 ( $p<.05$ ), which indicates that there is significant difference between Task 1 and Task 2, and Task 1 and Task 4. From the post hoc test for task difference in the immediate test, we know that the mean score of the group performing Task 2 is superior to that of Task 1 and Task 3, which means participants who complete Task 2 get better retention scores than students who finish Task 1 or Task 3 in the target words retention check immediately after the experiment.

In terms of the delayed test, the mean differences between Task 1 and the other three tasks are significant. The mean differences between Task 2 and Task 4 are not statistically significant, but they still have some differences in mean

scores. Since Task 2 is with higher evaluation than Task 3 and Task 4, from Table 4-9 we can find that in the immediate test, the mean retention score of Task 2 (mean=17.32) is higher than Task 3 (mean=12.14) and Task 4 (mean=15.19), while in the delayed test, the similar result can also be found, that is, the mean retention score of Task 2 was still superior to the other three tasks. Therefore, both the results in the immediate and delayed test proved the fourth prediction that Task 2 (reading and composition) with higher evaluation would yield the highest retention scores, which also support the Involvement Load Hypothesis.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the above results and discussions, the following findings emerge from the present investigation:

- 1) As far as the immediate task effects on vocabulary acquisition are concerned, the results partially support the Involvement Load Hypothesis. That is, Task B and S, which induce higher involvement load than Task M, yield significantly higher acquisition in the overall immediate posttest as well as the spelling and collocation measures. However, Task S does not produce acquisition significantly superior to Task B as predicted; rather, the latter enjoys a slight advantage over the former in overall acquisition, especially the acquisition of word spellings. Furthermore, the three tasks do not differ markedly in producing the receptive acquisition of word meanings.
- 2) In terms of the delayed task effects on vocabulary acquisition, the results support the hypothesis only to a limited degree. As is expected, Task S has greater effects than Task B, which in turn, has superior effects to Task M. the difference between Task S and M has reached a statistically significant level. However, no measurable difference exists between Tasks S and B, or between Task B and M.
- 3) Time has a great impact on vocabulary acquisition. That is, whichever task the students perform, they generally show a significant decrease in word knowledge with the exception of meaning over one week. In addition, the effect of Task B proves to be subject to diminution.
- 4) Students' English proficiency only influences the immediate task effects on vocabulary acquisition. As for high proficiency students, Task B produces significantly higher acquisition than Task S in the immediate posttest whereas these two conditions do not differ markedly for the low proficiency counterparts

In light of the findings of the present study, we may find some useful implications for vocabulary teaching and learning in China.

First, the results of this study suggest that teachers should design a variety of reading-based tasks that can induce the need for the attention to target words to develop learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Secondly, teachers could design or select tasks varying in involvement load for different words depending on the type of reinforcement they want to provide.

Third, due to the significant time effect on vocabulary acquisition as revealed by the current study, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to practice the vocabulary they have learnt so as to help them to better anchor the words in memory.

Fourth, the findings of this study also suggest that writing with new words could serve as an efficient means to extend and consolidate learners' vocabulary.

Finally, it would be highly desirable to communicate the findings of this study to Chinese learners as well, so that they will be aware of the effect of task-induced involvement loads on vocabulary acquisition and thus being able to make a better decision as to what kind of tasks they select to meet their individual needs of lexical learning.

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Table 4.1 The overall immediate task effects on vocabulary retention

Group	N	Mean	SD	F	P
M	50	55.87	14.27	30.732	.000
B	50	73.65	10.64		
S	52	71.09	10.02		

Note. M = multiple-choice questions; B = blank-filling; S = sentence-making;

N = number of students; total possible score for the test = 90.

Table 4.2 Scheffe post hoc comparisons for immediate task effects on vocabulary retention

Group	dif.	P
M vs. B	-13.74	.000
M vs. S	-12.16	.000
M vs. S	1.60	.609

Note. dif. = mean difference between the groups.

Table 4.3 Task effects on different parts of the immediate posttest

Immediate Posttest	Group	Mean	SD	F	P
Supply Spelling (Max. = 33)	M	13.22	7.75	54.882	.000
	B	24.51	6.47		
	S	21.97	7.17		
Matching (Max. = 24)	M	16.59	6.20	16.464	.000
	B	20.29	5.23		
	S	21.08	3.83		
Select Definition (Max. = 33)	M	30.15	4.52	.032	.969
	B	30.00	3.31		
	S	30.04	3.58		

Note. M = multiple-choice questions; B = blank-filling; S = sentence-making; Max. = maximum score.

Table 4.4 Scheffe post hoc comparisons for immediate task effects on the retention of spellings and collocations

Immediate Posttest	Group	dif.	P
Supply Spelling	M vs. B	-11.28	.000
	M vs. S	-8.74	.000
	B vs. S	2.54	.094
	M vs. B	-3.70	.000
Matching	M vs. S	-4.49	.000
	B vs. S	-.795	.645

Note dif. = mean difference between tile groups.

Table 4.5 The overall delayed task effects on vocabulary retention

Group	N	Mean	SD	F	P
M	81	54.32	16.16	6.277	.002
B	80	58.52	14.46		
S	72	62.83	13.68		

Note. M = multiple-choice questions; B = blank-filling; S = sentence-making;

N = number of students; total possible score for the test = 90.

Table 4.6 Scheffe post hoc comparisons for delayed task effects on vocabulary retention

Group	dif.	P
M vs. B	-4.21	.202
M vs. S	-8.52	.002
B vs. S	-4.32	.204

Note. dif. = mean difference between the groups.

Table 4.7 Task effects on different parts of the delayed posttest

Delayed Posttest	Group	Mean	SD	F	P
Supply-Spelling (max.= 33)	M	9.24	6.61	9.233	.000
	B	11.76	6.87		
	S	14.04	7.29		
Matching (max.= 24)	M	14.48	7.76	5.159	.006
	B	16.20	7.41		
	S	18.21	6.11		
Select-Definition (max. = 33)	M	30.59	4.31	.001	.999
	B	30.56	2.95		
	S	30.58	3.65		

Note. M = multiple-choice questions; B = blank-filling; S = sentence-making.

Table 4.8 Scheffe post hoc comparisons for the delayed task effects on retention of spellings and collocations

Delayed posttest	Group	dif.	
Supply Spelling	M vs. B	-2.52	.072
	M vs. S	-4.80	.000
	B vs. S	-2.29	.128
Matching	M vs. B	-1.72	.316
	M vs. S	-3.73	.006
	B vs. S	-2.01	.228

Note. dif. = mean difference between the groups

Table 4.9. Descriptive statistics for scores of the four treatments in immediate post-test and delayed post-test

Test		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F(between groups)	Sig.(between groups)
Immediate test	Task 1		8.99	5.51	15.615	.000
	Task 2		15.20	5.60		
	Task 3		12.12	4.78		
	Task 4		16.32	5.80		
Delayed test	Task 1		4.91	2.55	16.345	.000
	Task 2		9.49	4.00		
	Task 3		8.30	3.96		
	Task 4		11.00	4.33		

Notes: the mean difference is significant at the .05 level.



Table 4.10. Independent Samples Test (comparing the mean retention scores of Task 2 with that in Task 3 in the immediate test)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
The IM		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	Equal variances assumed	1.153	.286	-2.524	72	.014	-3.05	1.21
The DT	Equal variances not assumed			-2.524	70.28	.014	-3.05	1.21
	Equal variances assumed	.005	.973	-1.285	72	.203	-1.19	.93
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.285	71.9	.203	-1.19	.93

Notes: the IM=the immediate test, the DT=the delayed test.

Table 4-11. One-way ANOVA on the retention scores of the immediate test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1387.434	3	462.478	15.716	.000
Within Groups	4090.413	139	29.427		
Total	5477.846	142			

Table 4-12. One-way ANOVA on the retention scores of the delayed test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	699.109	3	233.036	16.345	.000
Within Groups	1981.716	139	14.257		
Total	2680.825	142			

To see the task effect on the retention scores among groups, a post-hoc-test for the one-way ANOVA was performed. The results are presented in Table 4.13.

Table 4-13. Multiple Comparisons of the mean scores of the four tasks in the immediate test and the delayed test

Dependent variable	(I)Task	(J)Task	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Immediate test	Task 1	Task 2	-8.35*	1.31	.000
		Task 3	-3.16	1.28	.064
		Task 4	-6.22*	1.28	.000
	Task 2	Task 1	8.35	1.31	.000
		Task 3	5.19	1.29	.000
		Task 4	2.13	1.29	.347
	Task 3	Task 1	3.16	1.28	.064
		Task 2	-5.19	1.29	.000
		Task 4	-3.05	1.26	.073
	Task 4	Task 1	6.22	1.28	.000
		Task 2	-2.13	1.29	.347
		Task 3	3.05	1.26	.073
Delayed test	Task 1	Task 2	-6.09	.91	.000
		Task 3	-3.38	.89	.001
		Task 4	-4.57	.89	.000
	Task 2	Task 1	6.09	.91	.000
		Task 3	2.70	.90	.014
		Task 4	1.51	.90	.330
	Task 3	Task 1	3.38	.89	.001
		Task 2	-2.70	.90	.014
		Task 4	-1.19	.88	.528
	Task 4	Task 1	4.57	.89	.000
		Task 2	-1.51	.90	.330
		Task 3	1.19	.88	.528

Notes: \* the mean difference is significant at the .05 level.



## Submission Letters across English Language Teaching and Mathematics: The Case of Iranian Professionals

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### Abstract

Submitting an article to an English journal for publication requires enclosing an accompanying cover letter. Yet, the phraseology and rhetorical conventions of such letters are not comprehensively documented in literature. This article investigates two English corpora of genuine electronic submission letters to journal editors by Iranian English Language Teaching and Mathematics professionals. After gathering 200 e-mail correspondences of academics with journal editors worldwide, 60 messages (30 from each) sent with the purposes of *providing or requesting information* were selected and analyzed for specific rhetorical patterns following Santos' (2002) model. Eventually, the results were juxtaposed to a highly characteristic covering letter – provided in Okamura and Shaw (2000). With few exceptions in Math corpus, both corpora illustrate proper choices regarding phraseology. Concerning rhetoric, ELT submission emails are more compatible with those of English native academics, whereas Math messages carry the rhetorical patterns in Non-native academics' messages. With the diversity that may exist in the generic structure and function of submission letters, further research investigating communicative purposes of e-mail genre is needed.

**Keywords:** Genre analysis, Cross-disciplinary analysis, Cover letters, Rhetorical conventions, Phraseology

### 1. Introduction

Since the early 80s applied linguists and language teachers, especially those concerned with the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), have shown a great deal of interest in genre-based approaches to the analysis of written and spoken discourse. This interest has, to a large extent, been motivated by pedagogical concerns, in particular by the need to provide satisfactory models and descriptions of academic and scientific texts and to enhance the ability of non-native speakers to understand, and where appropriate, to produce such texts in a rhetorically effective manner.

The textual repertoire within academic English has not only broadened but taken on a more social dimension, a central concern with real audiences and purposes. The advent of electronic spaces promises to broaden and diversify this repertoire even further. In addition, potential audiences for electronic texts are larger, more culturally diverse, and more unpredictable than ever before. However, academic research has not caught up with its task of sufficiently defining the norms which govern the use of this new medium, and it has so far provided no clear answer to the question of whether a stylistic protocol exists for the writing of e-mail messages. One example of these messages is electronic letters-to-the-editors.

The advent of the Internet and the electronic mail has profoundly changed the process of sending and receiving messages. Submitting an English article to a scientific journal requires enclosing an electronic cover letter accompanying the article to the journal. Yet, the possible phraseology and rhetorical conventions of such letters-to-editors are inadequately documented in the academic research arena. This is perhaps because the letter has almost no impact on the research or reviewing process. The neglect might also stem from the fact that it is only recently that an electronic submission letter has become a popular medium of communication among researchers and journal editors, and in fact, many journals still accept submission to be carried out only via air mail. This may lead to the conception that an electronic submission letter and an old non-electronic one should not be different, and so researchers might simply draw a blank on the potential impact of the medium on the structure of the electronic submission letter. However, writing an electronic submission letter is an international concern as more and more writers attempt to find space for publication in world reputed journals. On the other hand, with the increasing number of electronic journals and their time-honored tendency to accept submission via email, the need for writing an electronic submission letter is felt ever more. Within the ESP movement, more recently, this has drawn the attention to the rhetorical and schematic analysis of what Swales (1990) refers to as *occluded* genres to meet the communication demands of the academic community and to reflect the individual agency of those who use them.

Many journals provide a form for the submitting author to fill, which eliminates the need for a self-generated cover letter. Alternatively, for some authors, no more than one very generic sentence is necessary as an accompaniment to the

submission. According to Gump (2004), a well designed and succinct covering letter can “establish the author’s credibility”, request for consideration and possible publication of one’s unsolicited manuscript, and communicate a close affinity with editor (pp. 92-93). Donovan (2004), acknowledging Gump’s components of a covering letter, suggests the prospective authors provide the names of three potential reviewers, with their email and postal addresses (p. 222). In addition to being neat and error-free, Gump (2004) suggests using “credibility-establishing letterhead” (p. 95) and signing the letter if a covering letter is posted. Gump advises prospective authors to be concise, be authoritative but kind, and promise to consider the editor’s suggestions for revision (p. 97). Gump’s suggestion on covering letters, though appealing and potentially valuable, has unfortunately not been empirically tested.

In the domain of submission letters- an example of occluded genre- not many studies have so far been done. Swales (1996) examined a particular category of very short transactional letters, the submission letters-to-editors, written by native and non-native speakers of English (NSEs and NNSEs respectively). Okamura and Shaw (2000) scrutinized letters of article submission by native and non-native academics and compared them with efforts to write such letters by native and non-native speaker non-professionals from the perspective of rhetoric and phraseology. Magnet and Carnet (2006) investigated discursive and linguistic features of the letters-to-editors. Crossley (2007) analyzed article submission letters trying to identify the systematic variation in performance between L1 and L2 writers of English based on the linguistic features used to denote spatio-temporal perspectives.

Results have shown that non-native speakers are more prone to use the letter to emphasize their professional status and to intensify their request for attention by requesting for a response soon or as soon as possible (Swales, 1996). Results have also revealed that the teaching approach for writing depends significantly “on the status of the learners, and lexical phrases are particularly important for non-natives” (Okamura & Shaw, 2000, p. 1), that the cover letters provided by L2 writers generally adhered to the standards of the genre membership (Crossley, 2007), and that with their discursive features, “letters-to-the-editors can be considered a genre, but not a stable genre, since it has evolved since its origin” (Magnet & Carnet, 2006, p. 179).

Research concerning the cross-disciplinary analysis of the schematic structure of emails sent to professional journals for the purpose of article submission-something with which the present study is concerned- is at its embryonic stages. The problem is how we see this type of email developing in future as an informative covering letter, logically constructed, can indicate that the manuscript is also well-written and suitable for publication (Donovan, 2004; Gump, 2004). Baron (1998) believes that the future linguistic shape of email will be determined by interaction between two factors: technological potential and social choice. He compares the language of email messages to a spoken pidgin arguing that when the range of functions and the number of users expand, the email system evolves into a more linguistically rich and stable creole. Though this idea sounds a bit far-fetched now, what is apparent is that email is becoming as ubiquitous as the telephone in terms of ease and access. So, there is a rapid growth of correspondence through email and an urgent need to study cross-disciplinary variations. Moreover, research regarding the rhetoric and phraseology required for submission letters-to-editors (there is almost no guidance available in the textbooks, especially for non-natives of English who wish to write in this genre in a communicatively efficient manner), as well as the important pedagogical rationale for extending this genre is tremendously limited. Thus, the present research, following the generic model of business letters of negotiation proposed by Santos (2002), analyzed two corpora of English email messages sent by Iranian English Language Teaching (ELT) and Mathematics academics to journal editors worldwide with the communicative purposes of *providing* and *requesting* information.

In this article, Iranian English ELT and Mathematics’ submission letters-to-editors to the international journals were initially analyzed to see the extent that the emails differ from one another as far as the schematic moves (Note 1), conversational features, lexico-grammatical features, as well as positive and negative politeness strategies (Note 2) are concerned. The features focused on, among other possible features, could provide sufficient evidence on the nature of covering letters at different levels of analysis. Specifically,

- 1) Is there any significant difference between submission letters written by ELT and math professionals on the move types, steps, and sub-steps utilized by each group?
- 2) Does any significant difference exist in the lexico-grammatical, textual, and conversational features in ELT and math submission letters?
- 3) To what extent are the ELT and math submission letters different in terms of negative and positive politeness strategies that they utilize?
- 4) In the next phase of the study, the researcher measured the degree that the English emails written by both ELT and math professionals reflect the standards for genre membership by comparing the results of the study with a canonical (conventional) native English letter of submission. More specifically, the study targeted seeking answers to the following question:

5) To what extent do the submission letters written by the Iranian academics-both ELT and math academics- reflect the rhetorical standards for genre membership?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

The subjects in this research are among the Iranian ELT and math professionals who intend to submit an article to an international journal. The rationale for the selection of the fields was two-fold:

1. In the hierarchy of basic sciences math has a top-list location, and any decision made regarding generic analysis of math emails may provide possible hypotheses for the move structure of emails from other fields.
2. Selecting ELT from social sciences has partly to do with the fact that non-native ELT professionals are more proficient than Math professionals in using emails, and the emails they write can be more representative of standard rhetorical structure in the context of Iranian professionals writing emails in English.

The target group of Iranian academic writers from Math and English departments across the country was contacted. Sample letters of submission were collected from departments of Mathematics and English in Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Kerman, Sistan-Baluchestan, Yazd, Gilan, and Tabriz. These professionals were asked to send to the researcher some of their genuine submission letters to international scientific journals for a generic analysis while a promise was made to keep the content of their letters confidential. Both groups have one thing in common and it is their membership in the international sub-culture of science while they differ in what is considered as their proficiency and meta-linguistic awareness as far as communicating through English is concerned. First, for both groups Persian is the local mother tongue and English the international language through which both are expected to push their submissions ahead. It goes without saying that, for ELT professionals, English is the subject of study as opposed to Math professionals for whom the subject is Mathematics while English is the channel for communication of information. Accordingly, ELT professionals are expected to feel considerably at ease communicating with the journal editors while Math professionals with less competence in English may find their way through by asking for counseling from other professionals or utilizing the non-electronic sample letters available in books.

### 2.2 Corpus

First, 200 e-mail messages were gathered from the correspondence of Iranian English and Mathematics professionals with journal editors worldwide (100 from each discipline). Different sources were used to obtain the e-mails. They were mostly received as a result of 350 emails sent by the researcher to English and Mathematics professionals in faculties and departments.

The first round of analysis was performed on the initial corpora to acquire a general impression of the content as well as the organization of each messages, and also to choose homogeneous data as far as the communicative purpose was concerned, i.e. to select only those letters-to-editors sent for the purpose of article submission. Hereby, emails to editors for other purposes were omitted. Eventually, 60 covering letters (30 from each group) sent by 60 different English and Mathematics professionals (EPs and MPs hereafter) were selected for a deeper analysis. Even though there might be intervention on the part of translators or revisers in shaping the covering letters, they were ultimately regarded as the product of the researchers themselves because controlling this variable was practically not possible as emails had already been written by the time they were forwarded to me. The principal reason for the selection of these two types of messages was the fairly high frequency of these functions in e-mail messages in general and in the current corpora in particular.

For the purposes of recognition and easier access, the emails of each group were tagged separately. The symbols employed were E-em (1-30) and M-em (1-30) for English and Mathematics email messages by professionals respectively. Subsequently, on the basis of Santos' (2002) framework, the electronic messages were carefully investigated, and the obligatory and optional moves as well as the steps and sub-steps realizing the moves were identified. Also, the elements through which negative and positive politeness strategies are manifested were identified and operationally defined. Then, the frequency of each parallel move, step, sub-step, textual and conversational feature, and negative and positive politeness strategies was tallied.

In order to find whether the differences between the parallel moves, steps, sub-steps (Table 3), lexico-grammatical features (Table 4) and politeness strategies (See Table 10) in the two corpora were significant, a *chi square* test was applied, assuming (.05) level of significance.

### Insert Table 1 here

### 2.3 Models of analysis

Scrutinizing several coding schemes (Barron, 2006; Bhatia, 1993; Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Flowerdew & Dudley Evans, 2002; Flowerdew & Wan, 2006; Henry & Roseberry, 2001; Santos, 2002; Swales, 1990; Vergaro, 2002,

2004), the present research employed the move schemata suggested by Santos (2002) for letters of negotiation exchanged for the purposes of *providing or requesting information* because it was the most comprehensive. Subsequently, using the linguistic system of politeness strategies adopted by Upton and Connor (2001) in their study concerning job application letters, I further explored possible national sub-cultural similarities and differences in the e-mail messages. The typical features of form and function in the two corpora were specified on the basis of Santos' (2002) model. Those elements which were present in the model and in the emails as well, and the elements which existed in the model but absent in the data were identified. In addition, if an element was encountered that was absent in Santos' model, that element was recognized and added to the model. Furthermore, if some elements in the Santos' model were absent in the data, they were recognized and deleted. Finally, providing some modification to Santos' (2002) model, the researchers came up with a provisional coding scheme for letters of article submission presented in Table 3.

### 3. Data analysis

#### 3.1 The parallel constitutive moves

The results of chi-square tests for the constitutive moves indicated significant differences only in the distribution of the *Establishing the territory* move across EP and MP e-mail messages. Also, with the exception of *Establishing the territory* and *Evaluating* moves which were not frequent in either corpus, the remaining moves were obligatory. (See Table 1)

**Insert Table 1 right here**

#### 3.2 The parallel steps and sub-steps

The chi-square test displayed significant differences in *Indicating job status at university*, *Providing contact information*, *Providing author(s)' names*, *Indicating file format* and *Indicating journal name*. However, the differences in the frequencies of the remaining steps and sub-steps were not statistically significant. Those steps and sub-steps with a frequency of occurrence of 15 or above were considered obligatory and the remaining ones optional. Table 2 presents chi square results for the constitutive moves and Table 3 suggests a provisional coding scheme for submission letters.

**Insert Table 2 right here**

**Insert Table 3 right here**

#### 3.3 The parallel lexico-grammatical features

##### 3.3.1 Verbs

To determine the patterns of tense variation across the two corpora, the most typical verbs used in the e-mail messages were listed in a five-category table. The categories under which verbs were classified consisted of: 1) present (also present perfect and present progressive); 2) past (also past perfect and past progressive); 3) passive (including stative); 4) active; and 5) modals. The results revealed significant differences in the use of *Present tense*, *Active voice*, and *Modals* while for *Past tense* and *Passive voice* the differences were -though frequent in the case of passive voice- not significant. Table 4 displays the results of tense and voice types.

**Insert Table 4 right here**

##### 3.3.2 Personal pronouns

The categories under which personal pronouns were classified consisted of: 1) first-person singular; 2) second-person; 3) third-person singular; 4) first-person plural; 5) third-person plural; and 6) indefinite. The chi-square results revealed no significant difference in the use of *I*, *You*, *It*, and *We*. Additionally, 'third-person singular' except for *It*, third-person plural, and indefinite pronouns were totally absent in both corpora. (See Table 5)

**Insert Table 5 right here**

#### 3.4 The parallel textual features: Opening and closing steps

Initially, the overall distribution of different forms realizing the *opening* as well as *closing* steps across EP and MP e-mail messages was studied and the frequency of each element was calculated. The *chi-square* results revealed significant differences only in the use of *Dear + title + first name + surname* for the *opening* step and *(Best) (kind) regards* and *(Yours) sincerely* for the *ending* step. Also, *Dear + title + surname* and *Dear + title + first name + surname* were the most frequent opening forms in EPs and MPs corpora respectively while EPs and MPs were more likely to use frequently the complimentary phrases *(Best) (kind) regards* and *(Yours) sincerely* for *closing* respectively. Tables 6 and 7 illustrate the results for opening and closing steps. (Explanation of the significance appears in the Discussion section)

**Insert Table 6 right here**

**Insert Table 7 right here**

### 3.5 The parallel conversational features

Following Gimenez's (2000 & 2006) conversational framework, four conversational features (discourse particles, abbreviation, contracted forms, and decapitalization) were studied. The results of *chi-square* tests, revealed significant differences only in the use of *decapitalization*. The results, also, indicated that EPs were more likely to utilize *Decapitalization* while MPs used *Standard Abbreviation* more frequently (See Tables 8 & 9)

**Insert Table 8 right here**

**Insert Table 9 right here**

### 3.6 The comparison of negative and positive politeness strategies

The *chi-square* results revealed no statistically significant differences between the distributions of *Indirectness* strategy. Nevertheless, the obtained results of the *chi-square* test revealed a significant difference across the elements of *Expressing indebtedness*, *use of formulaic expressions*, and *modals*. (See Table 10 & 11)

**Insert Table 10 right here**

**Insert Table 11 right here**

Concerning positive strategies, the *chi-square* results revealed no significant differences in the parallel distributions of *Please + action verbs* and *Directness* across the two corpora. (See Table 12)

**Insert Table 12 right here**

## 4. Discussion

The results revealed that, in the face of some minor differences, the overall schematic structure in the two corpora was much alike. The observed differences were partially associated to the effects of context on text, for example, disciplinary variability and the specific need requirements of each group. The differences were also along the lines of what Vassileva (2001) refers to as the *intertextuality* that somehow encompasses the concept of transfer from thematically related texts.

The findings indicate six functional moves across the two corpora, among which *Establishing the information exchange chain*, *Providing information or answers*, *Requesting for information, action or favors*, and *closing* were fully present in every email across the two corpora hence obligatory. The *Establishing the territory* and *Evaluating* moves which were present in some but not in all emails were regarded as optional.

The optionality of the *establishing the territory* and *evaluating* moves in both corpora might be related to the effect of the context on texts hence discipline-dependent. The *evaluating* move was more frequent in EP electronic messages, owing to the theoretical and more subjective nature of their field. For this group giving personal opinion or making comment were some of the ways to make more contribution to their email correspondence while MPs favored the *Establishing the territory* move in an attempt to set the scene and trigger the addressee's relevant schemata.

The comparison between EP and MP e-mail messages at the level of steps and sub-steps revealed interesting results. Variation according to discipline was highly significant with reference to the step, *Indicating job status at university* which frequently occurred in EP messages, and the steps *Initial thanking*, *Final thanking*, and *Providing contact information*, which were more frequent in the MP e-mail messages. With regard to the sub-steps, *Providing author(s)' names*, *Indicating file format* and *Indicating journal name* were more frequent in MP messages while significantly less frequent - even absent in some cases- in EP messages.

The higher frequency of the *Indicating job status at university* step in EP messages might be attributed to their higher awareness of the medium due to their higher level of English language proficiency and thus having easier access to e-mail guidelines available in the internet (One may simply try writing *guidelines for cover letter* or *submission letter-to-editor* in the search space of Google) as well as in the textbooks. Obviously, one reason for MPs' desire to do without this step in particular and write shorter e-mail messages in general may be the phenomenon of *avoidance* as a result of their lower level of language proficiency (Note 3). A more plausible justification for their economy in this step may be discursal, cultural, and of course lack of rhetorical awareness.

Furthermore, the narrow set of realizations of the steps and sub-steps which occurred more repeatedly in MP messages can be explained by the *intertextuality* (Vassileva, 2001). As Vassileva points out, the production and reception of a given text is dependent upon the participants' knowledge of other texts. Vassileva also argues that not every new text is totally autonomous but draws at least on other previous texts. Accordingly, MPs seem to write electronic messages by observing certain cognitive schemata of previously written texts (traditional pen and paper letters in this case) and preserving the well- established non-electronic norms and conventions of these letters, for example initiating and terminating their messages with complimentary formulaic expressions.

Concerning the second research question, the results of verb types/voice analysis showed that present tense and active voice were more recurrent than other categories in the two corpora; moreover, passive voice was also used very frequently in the two corpora though not as frequently as active voice. Oftentimes, the researcher has not prepared the covering letter in advance and has to produce it off the cuff. On such occasions, present and active voice is resorted to. Alternatively, the use of present tense may be due to the shared and expected ongoing correspondence which may be followed in later follow-up emails, so more a function of the requirement of the rhetorical act, not to mention the fact that present tense makes the sentence stronger and gives force to the writing.

Also, the frequent use of passive voice might be attributed to the content of the message. In fact, since the writers were simply explaining a case by introducing it rather than by expressing their personal opinion, the case (the article being submitted) appeared to be as significant as the idea itself.

Additionally, one might attribute the prevalence of modals in MP e-mail messages to their dependence on the conventions of traditional letters and hence their reliance on formulaic expressions for presenting a polite request. In this case, there was a functional shift as the modals did not echo standard meaning any longer.

Concerning the distribution patterns of personal pronouns, the higher frequency of first-person singular in EP and second-person in MP might imply disciplinary variability. EPs had a tendency to use a collocation of *I* with private verbs expressing personal opinion-though not so frequently- (e.g., *I think, I believe, etc.*) to either indicate their wishes or plans or express their personal opinion and most frequently to request for action and favor (*I would be very grateful if...*). Since the medium is not necessarily connecting large groups of people in a discourse community together—as it is simply used by an academic trying to submit an article to a journal- the degree to which first person plural is used in both corpora is so small except for the cases in which the article has been co-authored; however, such cases do not necessarily entail the use of *we*. In addition, the more frequent use of *you* in MP electronic messages might be attributed to the higher frequency of the positive politeness strategy (i.e., directness) in the *introducing or providing information* move (*Attached, you can find...*). The overall findings are in consonance with Kuo's (1999) statement that such strategic use of personal pronouns seems to help writers to know how to emphasize their contribution to their fields, and how to seek cooperation and stress solidarity with expected interlocutors and their disciplines. In line with Hyland (2004), that "perceptions of audience in different genres influence rhetorical choices", it is argued here that cross-disciplinary differences as well as awareness of linguistic rules being constrained by contextual factors within the same genre also shape "patterns of engagement" (p. 22).

One prominent textual feature was the varied nature of the *opening* and *ending* steps across the two corpora. The results were contrary to those of Gains's (1998) reporting a high frequency of messages with no *opening* but a smaller number of messages with no *ending* step since almost all messages in the two corpora initiated or ended with some kind of opening or ending encoding politeness as indicating closer relationships. Additionally, the broad range of realizations for these steps may be justified by the flexibility inherent in this genre, thus allowing more personal idiosyncrasies to emerge. From these styles *Dear + title + surname* and *Dear + title + first name + surname* and *Dear + sir/ madam* and *Dear editor*, which were more frequent in both corpora compared with other styles of opening presented, exposed the power of the genre which seems to require ceremonial type of opening. These styles may also be regarded as *more polite* which are more likely a combination of a Persian strategy and a power relationship between the gatekeepers and submitters. *(Yours) sincerely* and *(Best) (Kind) Regards* that were favored by both groups also appeared as optional conventions by discourse community members for ending e-mail messages.

Regarding conversational features, the infrequent use of *discourse particles, non-standard abbreviations, contracted forms* and the higher frequency of *standard abbreviation* in both corpora might be the formality required by the register of submission as far as submitting of an article is concerned. In essence, in such a register there is no place for more relaxed, unplanned, and conversational style and, quite the reverse, some degree of formality is expected. However, the more frequent use of *decapitalization* and *non-standard abbreviations* by EPs revealed the semi-formal and personalized nature of their style. These are undoubtedly features borrowed from other informal emails, but the question is whether the medium (informal email) outweighs the power relations in these letters. Also, the less frequent use of contracted forms in both corpora and carefree punctuations such as dehyphenated and decapitalized words in EP corpora provided evidence of the stylistic diversity immanent in electronic mails of information exchange genre, in this study the genre of submission letters. Accordingly, the results of this study, to some extent, suggested that the group less dependent on the conventions of traditional letters (EPs) was more aware of the medium with a higher level of language proficiency.

In general, the low occurrence of conversational features in both EP and MP e-mail messages was compatible with Gain's (1998) findings indicating that most of the e-mails in his data appeared to have a largely consistent style and were characterized as using "semi-formal tone of co-operative colleagues"(p. 86), fully formed and correctly punctuated. Such uniformity of written style in EP messages is a challenge to the general compromise among researchers that electronic messages are a mixture of both oral and written properties of language. In effect, the results of this study

reveal that electronic submission letters are not inevitably informal or speech-like. As Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2001, p. 136) argue, email writing is based on spoken as well as written language, and it is the outcome of a particular context of situation, i.e., audience factors, topic factors, and setting factors, which decide on oral or written features in any discourse. Consequently, the findings indicate that electronic messages exhibit a distinct medium of communication in their own right affected and shaped by syntagmatic structure, features of genre, and addressor/addressee relationship.

The observed difference in the negative politeness strategies in the two corpora (See Table 11) is probably proficiency-dependent which is associated with discipline here. The use of *indirectness* in both corpora and higher use of *formulaic expressions*, *expressing indebtedness* and *modals* by MPs may mark their reflection on the norms and conventions of previously learned traditional letters. In essence, MPs, using negative politeness strategy though unconsciously rather than being aware of their addressees, integrate the above strategies in their messages. Conversely, EPs integrate their positive and negative politeness strategies into more varied and individualized messages. This might be related to their higher English language proficiency, as mentioned before, and their linguistic flexibility while adopting a dignified and polite style all at once. It might also have to do with context of situation in general and awareness of audiences' expectations in particular. The results of this part may comply with Swales' (1996) generic study of covering letters where native speaker professionals were more inclined to use negative politeness strategies compared with non-native speaker professionals who were more inclined to use the letter to emphasize their professional status, and to persist on their request for attention by asking for a quick response hence using a positive politeness strategy. Results therefore provide sound evidence that EPs, despite their greater language proficiency, still exhibit marked differences with native speakers since their greater use of positive strategies suggests the influence of their first language culture on their second language performance.

Addressing the fourth question and taking both groups as professionals who already have membership to the same subculture, here international subculture of science, the researcher contrasted the results of the study with the generic structure of a canonical native letter of submission to the editor of an international journal. The letter was recognized as the most characteristic and frequent covering letter of article submission as mentioned in Okamura and Shaw (2000). Also the researcher took account of the way native speaker professionals (NSPs) followed through in the study, conducted by Okamura and Shaw (2000), of transactional letters. Initially, both groups - ELT and Math professionals - were inclined to use the head acts almost as much frequently as NSPs did in Okamura and Shaw's (2000) study. In essence, the steps *Introducing and providing information* and *Requesting for actions* which are taken as head acts were, with minor differences, almost equally frequent in both ELT and Mathematics corpora which paves the way, though not full-scale, to justify the group membership in the genre. Secondly, as far as supportive moves in Okamura and Shaw's study are concerned, both ELT and Math professionals incorporated almost equally but scantily frequent steps with very marginal differences in which case they conformed to NSPs model in which only head acts are most dominant.

Regarding sub-steps, particularly the sub-steps *Providing author(s)' names*, *Indicating file format* and *Indicating journal name*, in essence, ELTs, not math professionals, were less likely to use such supportive moves, even though a move such as reference to file format might be very necessary in present-day communication but was not relevant to Okamura and Shaw's work where the covering letters all accompanied paper submission. This difference was partly compatible with Okamura and Shaw's study given that NSPs in their study scarcely contained supportive moves except for *Request for the response* and *Comments on the paper*. Actually, as Okamura and Shaw put it, NSPs rarely used supportive moves to explain the reason for writing or the status of the writer while professional non-natives (NNSPs) used a wide range of support moves. In actuality, professional non-natives were more prone to provide personal information about themselves or the source of their paper and to call attention to the value of the paper submitted "even flattering the editor- your world-famous journal" (p. 7), constructing much longer letters than the canonical one.

I might claim that, overall, understanding the rhetoric by both groups was probably the outcome of their sub-culture membership, here internationalized subculture of science. Furthermore, the reason for which Math professionals were more inclined to the use of supportive moves hence providing more details might be the concern of possible rejection from the part of journal editor under which they write the letters. This greater concern might suggest their less confidence in choosing the right linguistic and rhetorical patterns that might consequently lead to the editor's judgment of their lack of proficiency and effective writing.

Also, with regard to phraseology, except for very few cases in Mathematics corpus, both groups illustrated appropriate choice of vocabulary and phraseology, suggesting that for ELT professionals English is the subject of study on whose skills they have directly focused intensively hence helping them possess a high level of proficiency. For math professionals the reason is probably their acquaintance with the writing skill through attending to other genres and teaching in intertextuality. However, despite their successful performance in choice of vocabulary and phraseology, the deviations existing in the writings of MPs in textual features, use of formulaic expressions, expressing indebtedness,



and modals raise doubt over the overall language proficiency of MPs. In a nutshell, the emails written by the Iranian professionals-both ELT and math academics- reflect the standards for genre membership to a great extent.

Taking up Santos' (2002) model as a framework, this study presented a provisional model of covering letters. Even though the proposed model may by and large be applicable to an extensive range of e-mail messages with the communicative purposes of *requesting or providing information*, there are probably conspicuous variations as far as schematic move structure, the choice of steps, and formal features across different disciplines are concerned. Therefore, email writers are expected to be aware of them, since conscious recognition of text structure is a requirement for their efficient reproduction.

Strengthening their mental schema by studying the proposed coding scheme and information in this research, professional email writers and readers can determine which parts of a message to skim first, and then decide whether to read, save, or delete the message without pinpointing the whole message. Additionally, acquiring specific schemata of e-mail sub-genres in different disciplines is needed since members of different discourse communities share various sets of specified schemata sticking to which is required to become active members of those discourse communities.

However, since the corpora analyzed are limited to 60 university professionals from only two disciplines, generalizations can only be made about letters-to-editors' emails by academic members of the disciplines under study, thus not allowing for a more comprehensive cross-cultural analysis of e-mail messages. Finally, this study, following Santos'(2002) framework, presents only the coding scheme of e-mail messages exchanged for the two communicative purposes of *providing or requesting information*, and thus it by no means encompasses the whole range of e-mail messages with other communicative purposes. With the diversity that exists in the academic community, the variety of disciplines involved, and the ever increasing need for submitting articles to scholarly journals, more interdisciplinary and intercultural studies are needed to make more valid generalizations. Further comparison of disciplinary sub-corpora will reveal something about the disciplines or language proficiency; comparison of the norms of email writing and the norms found empirically by previous writers for non-electronic submission letters will divulge the power of the medium; comparison of these emails with emails in general reveals the influence of social and power distance; and comparison of this study and the recommendations of experts might disclose weaknesses in these letters.

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## Notes

Note 1. For Swales. (1990). moves represent writer’s social purposes.

Note 2. Politeness strategies are developed for the purpose of dealing with face threatening acts. Brown and Levinson. (1987). sum up politeness behavior in four strategies: (1) bold on record does nothing to minimize threats to hearer’s face, (2) positive politeness strategy shows that you recognize that your hearer has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and reciprocal, (3) negative politeness strategy recognizes the hearer’s face and that you are imposing on him, and (4) off-record indirect strategy takes some of the pressure off you. You are trying to avoid direct face threatening acts of asking for something.

Note 3. MPs are regarded as less proficient on account of the fact that, for these academics, English is peripheral whereas EPs are usually more proficient because, for them, English is both the subject and the object of study.

Table 1. Frequency and Chi-square Results for the Constitutive Moves in the Two Corpora

Moves	Frequency		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EP	MP		
Establishing the information exchange chain	30	30	.000	1.000
Establishing the territory	1	8	5.444	.020
Providing information or answers	30	30	.000	1.000
Requesting information, action or favors	30	30	.000	1.000
Evaluating	5	0	2.667	.102
Closing	30	30	.000	1.000

Table 2. Frequency and Chi-square Results for Different Steps and Sub-steps across the Two Corpora

Moves	Steps	Sub-steps	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
			EP	MP		
1	Defining the participants: to, from, date, and subject line		30	30	.000	1.000
	Opening		30	30	.000	1.000
2	Initial thanking		1	6	3.571	.059
	Expressing personal pleasure for submitting		0	2	.333	.564
3	Advising about the message		30	29	.017	.796
	Introducing and providing information		28	28	.000	1.000
		Indicating co-authorship	15	15	.000	1.000
		Providing author(s)' names	0	8	.6	.014
		Providing articles' number of pages	0	1	.384	.555
		Providing article title	21	25	8.67	.500
		Indicating file format	2	13	5.512	.019
4	Continuing, adding or updating		5	2	1.286	.257
	Requesting for actions		23	28	.490	.484
		Indicating journal name	9	28	9.757	.002
		Indicating journal status	3	2	.200	.655
		Referring to journal's forthcoming issues	1	0	.384	.555
	Requesting for opinions, comments or suggestions		2	0	.333	.564
	Indicating wishes, intentions or plans		4	0	1.800	.180
	Acknowledging receipt of a message		4	7	.818	.366
	Applying pressure tactics		3	7	1.600	.206
5	Giving personal opinion		4	0	1.800	.180
	Making comments		2	0	.333	.564
6	Encouraging further response		10	4	2.571	.109
	Final thanking		4	10	2.571	.109
	Note and PS-line		5	3	.500	.480

Table 3. Communicative Moves Characteristic of Letters of Article Submission

Move	Definition and exemplification of moves
<b>Establishing the information exchange chain</b>	- the writer "introduces and sets the scene and the communication chain" (Santos, 2002, p. 178)
<b>a) Defining the participants</b>	- it incorporates four main elements namely, to, from, date, and subject-line: E-em 14: From: m To: Journal of East Asian Linguistics Sent: Saturday, February 17, 2007 10:10 PM Subject: submission of an article
<b>b) Opening</b>	- It is taken as the conventional complimentary greeting observed at the beginning of some electronic messages: M-em 4: Dear Professor B
<b>Establishing the territory</b>	- the writer provides sufficient background knowledge to trigger the addressee's relevant schemata
<b>a) Initial thanking</b>	- the writer refers to previous message in order to provide the addressee with some context: M-em 13: Thank you very much for the previous communications
<b>b) Expressing personal pleasure for submission</b>	- the writer tries to express his /her enthusiasm and pleasure to submit an article to the journal M-em 27: ... It is a pleasure for me to submit the attached paper...
<b>Providing information and answers</b>	- It provides answers and information which may either be new or shared by both counterparts (Santos, 2002)
<b>a) Advising about message by mail</b>	-the writer lists documents attached to the electronic message or sends requested addresses or documents of introducing the topic: E-em 20: ...,please find our article...
<b>b-1) Indicating co-authorship</b>	- the writer refers to the submitted article as a shared authorship: M-em 18 : ... files of my joint paper...
<b>b-2) Providing author(s)' names</b>	- M-em 22: ... jointly written with Professor "L. H"...
<b>b-3) Providing article's number of pages</b>	- <b>M-em 23:</b> ...a survey article in 10 pages...
<b>b-4) Providing article title</b>	- <b>E-em 20:</b> ...our article entitled " An Account of Null-Pre...

<b>b-5) Indicating file format</b>	- the writer indicates the electronic format by which the file was produced: M-em 17: ... are LaTeX files of my new joint paper...
<b>Continuing, adding, or updating</b>	- The writer either supports his/her ideas or provides more contexts: <b>E-em 10:</b> ..., plus my bio... M-em 28: ...The manuscript has been prepared using...
<b>Requesting information, action, and favors</b>	- the writer raises an issue or requests an action or a favor to be done
<b>a) Requesting for action</b>	- the writer states the specific action that he wants the reader to take: E-em 19: ... for consideration and possible publication...
<b>a-1) Indicating journal name</b>	- E-em 25: ... for publication in the Journal of Translation Studies...
<b>a-2) Indicating journal status</b>	- the writer, using descriptive adjectives, refers to the status and the quality of the publishing journal: E-em 22: ... submit this article to your high caliber journal...
<b>a-3) Referring to journals' forthcoming issues</b>	- Wishing his/her article to be published forthcoming issues early-on, the writer refers to the journals' upcoming issue as the one in which his/her article may be published.
<b>b) Requesting for opinion, comments, or suggestions</b>	- the writer requests for the addressees' suggestions opinion, comments, or suggestions on an unclear issue using modals followed by please: E-em 14: ... would you please kindly let me know if...
<b>c) Indicating wishes, intentions, or plans</b>	- <b>E-em 12:</b> ... I hope you may find it suitable for publication...
<b>d) Acknowledging receipt of a message</b>	- the writer expresses his/her desire to be notified of the receipt of the article and the attachments: <b>E-em 28:</b> ...Acknowledgement of the receipt of this mail ...
<b>e) Applying pressure tactics</b>	- Using a positive politeness strategy, the writer puts his /her addressee under pressure to respond to the requests as he/she desires: <b>M-em 7:</b> ... Please inform me about .....as soon as possible.
<b>Evaluating</b>	- the writer expresses his/her emotional feelings and intentions through appraising the issue of the concern and expressing his/her opinion
<b>a) Giving personal opinion</b>	- Using certain lexical options that carry the meaning of personal impact, the writer presents his personal opinion: E-em 25: ... which I think might be suitable for publication in the Journal of...
<b>b) Making comment</b>	- However indirectly, the writer may try to exert some degree of personal impact E-em 22: ... The quality of the articles published so far is excellent...
<b>Closing</b>	- The participants sign off and provide individual professional data
<b>a) Encouraging further response</b>	- M-em 26: ... I'm looking for hearing from you...
<b>b) Final thanking</b>	- Using complimentary phrases, the writer expresses thanks towards the addressee: E-em 3: ... Many thanks in advance...
<b>c) Note and PS-line</b>	- The writer uses this step either to provide last-minute information or to convey relevant information that deserves special attention (Santos, 2002): E-em 21: P.S. I have enclosed my CV as well
<b>d) Signing off</b>	- the writer uses complementary phrases thus claiming the ownership of the message: M-em 21: Truly Yours
<b>e) Signature line</b>	- the writer adds a signature line at the end of the message introducing him/herself by typing his/her 'name': E-em 22: Sincerely Yours R. S
<b>f) Indicating job-status at university</b>	- the writer refers to his / her rank-status among the university academics where he /she teaches: E-em 21: R. S. PhD Assistant Professor in Applied Linguistics
<b>g) Indicating university credentials</b>	- the writer provides information such as contact information and the exact whereabouts of the university he / she is currently affiliated with M-em 25: Department of pure math, Faculty of Mathematical sciences. Tabriz university. Tabriz, Iran
<b>h) Providing contact information</b>	- the writer provides his/ her own contact information for any potential communication E-em 15: I can be contacted through the following: Mailing address Iran, Tehran, P. O. Box: 114.. – 1.. e-mail address m@cha...ut.a....

Table 4. Frequency and Chi Square Results for Tense Types and Voice

Tense types and Voice		Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
		EP	MP		
Tense	Past	3	1	1.000	.317
	Present	74	44	7.627	.006
	Active	70	40	8.182	.004
Voice	Passive	46	57	1.755	.278
Modals(should, could, and would)		19	36	5.255	.022

Table 5. Frequency and Chi-square Results for Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
	EP	MP		
I	31	25	.643	.423
You	22	35	2.965	.085
It	10	7	.529	.467
S/he	0	0	-	-
We	5	0	2.667	.102
They	0	0	-	-
One/anyone	0	0	-	-

Table 6. Frequency and Chi-square Results for Different Forms Realizing the *Opening Step*

Different forms of opening	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
	EP	MP		
Dear + title + surname	9	7	.529	.467
Dear + group(e.g., colleagues, all)	2	1	.333	.564
Recipient's name	0	0	-	-
Hello (all)	0	0	-	-
Dear + editor	8	3	1.395	.238
Dear + journal name +editor	2	0	.194	.659
Dear Sir/ Madam	6	3	1.000	.317
Dear + editor of + journal name	1	1	.000	1.000
Dear + title + first name + surname	4	13	4.000	.046
Respectful editor	0	1	.384	.555
Dear editor-in-chief	0	1	.384	.555
Messages without this step	0	1	.384	.555

Table 7. Frequency and Chi-square Results for Different Forms Realizing the *Closing Step*

Different forms of signing off politely	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
	EP	MP		
(Best) (kind) regards	12	5	4.000	.046
(Yours) sincerely	8	21	6.533	.011
(All the) best (wishes)	5	0	2.667	.102
Sorry	0	0	-	-
Cheers	0	0	-	-
(Yours ) truly	1	2	.333	.564
Respects	1	0	.384	.555
(With) (the best) regards	0	1	.384	.555
Yours	1	0	.384	.555
E-mail messages with no ending	2	2	.000	1.000

Table 8. Conversational Features Characteristic of Letters of Article Submission

Conversational feature	Definition and exemplification
Discourse particles	- Typically found in spoken discourse, they are rare outside of the conversational genres (Biber, 1988): M-em13: Now,...
Abbreviations	- Their use may be seen as evidence for existence of specialized discourse communities (Swales, 1990) E-em 10: bio ... (conventionalized abbreviation, i.e., biography) E-em6: plz...(personalized abbreviations, i.e., please)
Contracted forms	- It is very rare in formal letters as it provides evidence for the stylistic similarity with informal spoken discourse (Gimenez 2000): E-em 7: ...by the time you've sent it...
Capitalization	- Since decapitalization can be associated with informal unplanned discourse, capitalization is also worthy of some consideration (Gimenez 2000): E-em 15: attached you will find...

Table 9. Frequency and Chi-square Results of Conversational Features

Conversational features		Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
		EP	MP		
Discourse particles		0	2	.194	.659
Abbreviation	Standard	7	13	1.800	.180
	Non-standard	4	0	3.000	.083
Contracted forms		2	3	.200	.655
Decapitalization		8	1	5.444	.020

Table 10. Politeness Strategies Characteristic of Letters of Article Submission

Politeness Strategy	Definition and exemplification
<b>Negative politeness strategies</b>	- They show that the speaker acknowledges the addressee's independence and freedom of action (Brown and Levinson, 1987)
<b>a) Indirectness</b>	- The speaker uses linguistic structures that do not begin with words such as, I, you, or my (Upton and Connor, 2001) E-em 16: ... whether it fits the scope of your journal...
<b>b) Modals</b>	- Modals have the effect of softening them idea being communicated (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999): M-em 30: ... if you could let us know of the status of...
<b>c) Formulaic expressions</b>	- The intent of such expressions is to couch personal desires and wishes, and they are not in themselves necessarily a negative politeness strategy (Upton and Conner, 2001): E-em 3: ...I would appreciate it if you could kindly inform me of ...
<b>d) Expressing indebtedness</b>	- It is as 'going on record as incurring a debt' (Brown and Levinson (1987): M-em 24:...I should be most grateful if...
<b>Positive politeness strategies</b>	- The speaker emphasizes shared goals and common ground of the addresser and addressee (Upton and Conner, 2001)
<b>a) Directness</b>	- The writer threatens the independence of the addressee using sentences starting with the phrase please + action verb or the pronouns I, you, or my: E-em 10: ... Please confirm the receipt of the email...

Table 11. Frequency and Chi-square Results of Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
	EP	MP		
Indirectness	10	11	.048	.827
Use of formulaic expressions	3	12	5.400	.020
Expressing indebtedness	10	26	7.111	.008
Modals	19	36	5.255	.022

Table 12. Chi-square Results of Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies	Frequency		$\chi^2$	P-value
	EP	MP		
Please + action verbs	12	22	2.941	.086
Using interrogatives	0	0	-	-
Directness	31	31	.000	1.000



## An Analysis on the Importance of Motivation and Strategy in Postgraduates English Acquisition

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### Abstract

Postgraduates' English acquisition is an intriguing but complex process. A lot of factors have contributed to the outcome of a learner's acquisition, among them, motivation and strategy are playing a crucial role. Motivation is the driving force to encourage the learner to learn, while strategy being the techniques or devices for a learner to use for gaining knowledge. Since both belong to learner factors that may account for individual differences in postgraduates' English acquisition process, it is essential to discuss and analyze them for Postgraduates' English achievement.

**Keywords:** Postgraduates' English acquisition, Motivation and strategy, Learner factors

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1 Factors affecting the outcome of postgraduates' English acquisition*

In second language acquisition, many scholars argue that in the same class setting. Some students progress rapidly while others struggle along making very slow progress. Some learners never achieve nativelike command of a second language. Researches show that different kinds of factors from various aspects influence the process of second language acquisition and make it very complex. A variety of factors and their inter-relationship are shown in table 1.

#### *1.2 The current research trend in second language acquisition*

Researchers of different groups emphasize different factors. In second language acquisition research, there is a tendency to move from teacher-dominated instruction to individual learner-oriented process, because learner is the key player in second language acquisition. According to the schema provided above, I would argue that the learner factors are more important than others explaining individual difference in postgraduates' English achievements. Without any doubt, postgraduates in China are in the similar social, economic, cultural and linguistic background. School resources, teaching methods and assessment measurements may determine the differences of their group English level. Besides, most families of postgraduates are almost at the same living condition and most postgraduates themselves live on campus. The influence from family is quite minimal. Among all the learner factors, unmodifiable factors play an important role, but they are something given and people can not alter. It is the modifiable factors that are significant to be explored, because both learners and instructors can adopt themselves to them if they know why and how to do it. It is true that learner's learning purposes, belief and effort are part of learner's motivation(Ellis:509),so this paper considers motivation and strategy as two key factors to account for the differences of postgraduates' English learning achievement.

### 2. Motivation in Postgraduates' English acquisition

#### *2.1 Two kinds of definition*

Gardener defines motivation as the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language. He argues that motivation refers to the directed effort individual learners make to learn the language, the effects of learners' orientation are mediated by their motivation----that is, whereas, orientation and second language learning are indirectly related; motivation and achievement are directly related.

However, Ellis(1994:523-525)claims that strength of motivation serves as a power of predictor of second language achievement, but may itself be the result of previous learning experience. He offers four hypotheses to characterize a non-theoretical view of motivation. First, motivation derives from an inherent interest in the learning task the learner is asked to perform. Second, learners who do well will persevere; those who do not do well will be discouraged and try less hard. Third, the learner brings to the learning situation a certain quantity of motivation as a given. And fourth, external influences and incentives will affect the strength of the learner's motivation. It is likely that the relationship

between motivation and achievement is an interactive one.

## 2.2 Two types of classification

Gardner and Lambert mentioned two types of motivation, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. A learner is said to be integratively motivated when the learner wishes to identify with another ethnolinguistic group. By way of contrast to integrative one, Gardner and Lambert introduced the concept of instrumental motivation, in which the learner is motivated to learn a second language for utilitarian purposes, such as furthering a career, improving social status or meeting an educational requirement.

Through investigating the relationship between the English proficiency and motivational orientation, some researchers believed that those students with their instrumental motivation outperformed those with integrative motivation on the test of English proficiency. Other researchers found that their subjects' achievement in foreign language was linked to both types of motivation. In my opinion, it is very difficult to determine to what extent instrumental motivation outperforms integrative motivation in graduates' English achievement. It is no doubt that graduates have both instrumental and integrative motivation in the process of their English Study. Most graduates admit that they are more instrumentally motivated than integratively motivated. Even among the instrumentally motivated graduates, their "instruments", that is, the driving forces are not the same. Postgraduates in China have already learned English for at least ten years before, most of them have strong desire to achieve the goal of learning the language, but different students have set up different goals. Still some of them do not work hard enough, some even reveal unfavorable attitudes towards learning. With passive inclination, it would certainly hamper their English achievement in the end. All these differences in learning attitudes lead to the individual differences in their English proficiency, which, to a certain extent, explain the different outcome of regular English tests. Other internal sources of motivation, such as self-confidence may be more important than other types of motivation in some contests. Motivation can also take the form of intrinsic interest in specific learning activities and, as such, may be more easily influenced by teachers than goal-directed motivation.

The discussion above indicates that postgraduates have different kinds of motivation although they are in the same class. If a teacher does not know the origin of his students' motivation, or, if a teacher does not know how to guide his students' motivation to a successful learning achievement, how can he or she help them in their English study? Therefore, it is important for teachers to positively inspire their students' motivation through short-term and long-term measures, such as establishing the aims of course, and the objectives within it, and making the aims and goals of the course clear well in advance and drawing the attention of the students to the achievement of them. Through long-term and short-term measures, teachers can stimulate the students' desire to think and attract them to complete their learning task, so as to encourage the students to be interested in both the language and the culture not only in classroom, but also in the whole process of their English learning. In other words, teachers can use different kinds of measures to positively affect not only the students' instrumental motivation, but also their integrative motivation, thus leading them to the path of successful English acquisition.

## 2.3 Stimulation of postgraduates' learning motivation

In English teaching, we find that the intensity of the students' integrative motivation and instrumental motivation is not immutable. There exist inconsistency and uncertainty. The course of learning is not in a sole form. Learning motivation, in a certain stage, maybe strengthened or lessened by outside influence, while extrinsic motivation may transform into intrinsic motivation, especially for the ones with persistency, to help the learner succeed in study. As for this variability, what role should the teacher play? The teacher encounters a confliction: how will he teach? how can he transmit his force of influence into his students to form their intrinsic motivation and to increase their learning efficiency? These questions can be discussed in four aspects.

### 2.3.1 Emotional factor in teaching

Learning process is an emotional process. It is affected by different emotional factors. The teacher and his students engage in various emotional activities in it and varied fruits of emotion are yielded. What is emotion? Its implication is wide-ranging and rather implicit. It often serves as a general definition of a series of psychological phenomena, such as feeling, inner experience, need, desire, value pursuit, and so on.

Varied emotional factors work in the course of teaching and play an important role in effectiveness of learner and teacher' classroom activities. The emotional factor in the teaching environment that affects the learning mainly is the teacher's characteristic of personality. An enthusiastic and considerate teacher can offer satisfaction to the learner's extra needs. This helps strengthen the learner's study motivation. On the other hand, a teacher's attitude towards the learner has major influence on the learner's learning. As regards emotional cramming, a teacher's physically and mentally pouring into his teaching, and being filled with affection, will help arouse the learning enthusiasm of the learners. However, if the teacher only works as a "teaching craftsman" and put no emotion into teaching, the classroom will become static to lessen the learning enthusiasm of the learners. For this reason, the teacher must place emphasis on



emotional interaction with the learner.

### 2.3.2 Re-establishment of the subject in teaching.

The status and function of the subject among the teacher and the learner in English learning is a matter of overall importance, it is also the starting point and foothold where we make a change in teaching ideology. In the process of teaching there are two subjects: the teacher and the learner, and two forms of activities: teaching and learning, still one common object—the English language. When the subject is the learner, the object as cognition is the English language, the symbolic system and its function. When the subject is the teacher, the English language as the object of cognition is not the symbolic system but an abstract law related to the language that is the law of how to learn the language.

Once the new view is established, the teacher becomes an organizer and director of teacher rather than a sole old-styled transmitter of knowledge. He will organize and direct every learning activity on base of various linguistic features and different learner groups. Actually a foreign language is mastered by learning, not by teaching. In this sense, monitoring “learning” means catching of this point. The effect of English learning depends, to large extent, upon the learner’s subjective initiative and degree of participation. For that reason, the teacher should offer in class “open” questions rather than “close” questions. This method makes the teacher naturally prolong the waiting time so that more time is left for the learners to output. Activities in groups or in pairs can create more natural classroom air, which helps enhance the learners’ output. If the learner participates in the classroom interaction, they will straight obtain chances of learning and mastering the language they are also involved in scheduling their own learning. All this will make them more active and more responsible. Sequentially, the strong and significant learning motivation is formed to cultivate their potential faculty, which lays a solid foundation to enhance the teaching effect and achieve the expected goal.

### 2.3.3 Supplying information feedback to enhance the short-term motivation

Behavioristic psychologists first perceived the colossal influence of feedback exerted on motivation. Weinstein (1989) once explicitly pointed out that the form and amount that were supplied by the teacher had a direct influence on the learner’s learning motivation, self-awareness and sense of achievement in study, which, furthermore, influenced the learners’ learning effect. In practical teaching, feedback indicates information on accomplishment of a learning task in order to improve and raise the learners’ achievement. With the help of related information obtained from the teacher’s feedback, the learner keep abreast of the result of his learning motivation and level of his learning behavior for greater progress in study.

### 2.3.4 Proposition of new goals for enhancing long-term motivation

English must not be treated as a sole or isolated course to learn. A postgraduate should probe for as much as possible various knowledge related to language learning by employing varied means and accesses. In this way, he can lay a solid foundation of his further study and reinforce his confidence in learning the language well. For that reason, the teacher, while conveying knowledge, should pay attention to cultivating the learners’ sense of themselves and set up new goal at different learning stages—long-term, short-term and medium-term goals, which will help reinforce his long-term motivation. It is when a goal is realized that a new goal is laid down and the motivation is reinforced. This process is the one that short-term motivation is transformed into long-term motivation.

Besides the methods discussed above, there are some other effective strategies to stimulate motivation for learning English, such as creating a comfortable atmosphere, building students’ confidence, promoting cooperative learning, and incorporating the multiple intelligences concept in the classroom. All these strategies do have practical application in classroom and can motivate students’ interest in English learning, particularly with regard to their consistently weak oral skills.

## 3. Strategy in Postgraduates’ English acquisition

### 3.1 Two kinds of definition

The research of learning strategies is an important part of second language acquisition research. Learning strategies influence not only the rate of acquisition, but also the ultimate level of achievement (Wen: 4); they are of great importance to illustrate the individual difference in second language acquisition.

Learning strategies are the particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn a second language. They can be behavioral or mental; they are typically problem-oriented. As an English teacher, I find students’ English achievement in the same course is dramatically different from what we expect, although they are taught by the same teacher with the same teaching material under the same learning environment. Many a student are keenly interested in learning English well and work very hard, however, their performance is not satisfactory as expected. What are reasons behind the differences? As mentioned above, there are many learner-factors putting together with the non-learner factors in the outcome of second language achievement, it is difficult to indicate the elements conducive to the outcome. The key factor for learners in the same learning environment can be their learning strategy. It is easy to point out some effective learning methods because there are books available on learning methodology. But it is a daunting task to find

strategies suitable for individual learner. I would argue that every individual learner should analyze his or her “learner-factors”, and search for him/herself an ideal pattern of language learning. Teachers should do an extensive research on learning strategy to help his or her students to adapt to the learning environment in a favorable manner.

### *3.2 Classification of learning strategy*

Various classifications on learning strategy are divided by different researchers, among them Wen’s classification is the most effective one. Wen divided learning strategy into two categories: management strategies and language learning strategies. Management strategies are not English-learning specific strategies, they are of a higher level, and they can also be used in other activities. Management strategies are a series of actions such as self-planning, goal-setting, self-monitoring and self-evaluation, etc. These strategies can be used in both short-term and long-term study. Language learning strategies are ideas on language learning, which can be further divided into two groups: traditional strategies and non-traditional strategies. According to Wen, traditional strategies emphasize the explicitness and accuracy of language, while non-traditional strategies emphasizing the implicit and communication of language. Wen also suggests that the combination of the two terms be the best strategies in language learning. The combination must be of moderate degree, that is to say, learners can never go to the extreme of balance of the two terms. For instance, in the process of English learning, it is inevitable that the learners may make some mistakes in their oral practice, so they shouldn’t remain silent or shy away speaking out before they are certain to speak accurate sentences. Frequently, they may encounter some new words or different grammar structures, but at least they can make an educated guess instead of consulting the dictionary from time to time. However, to ignore the mistakes and counting too much on guessing may hamper the learners to move on and make progress.

Through the definition and classification of learning strategy, we can see that learning strategy plays an important role in enhancing postgraduates’ English competence. The choice of different learning strategies may lead to the different achievements. It is of paramount importance to discuss learning strategy in postgraduates’ English learning and teaching.

Most of the studies (O’Malley and Chamot 1990; Wenden and Rubin 1987; Oxford and Crookall 1989) found the learners who were particularly taught strategies performed better than those who were not. Good language learners make use of metacognitive knowledge to help them assess the needs, evaluate progress and give directions to their learning.

### *3.3 Approaches to strategy training*

All learning strategy reflects underlying metacognitive processes including planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating.

Planning strategies help learners develop and use forethought. The teacher provides a task and explains clearly the rationale. Students are asked to choose methods of completing the task and the strategies are employed. These include strategies such as setting goals, activating prior knowledge, predicting, organizational planning and self-management.

Monitoring strategies encourage learners to measure how effective they are while working on a particular task. Examples are selective attention, self-questioning, personalizing, taking notes, using imagery, and self-talk. During this process, they pay attention to the strategy they are using and check comprehension.

Problem-solving strategies provide assistance when a learner has difficulty during a task. They include inferencing, substituting, asking questions to clarify, and using resources. Learners are expected to solve the problems by using these strategies. If this can be achieved, learners will become highly motivated, thus, facilitating learning.

Evaluating strategies encourage reflection on how well a learning task went. Examples are verifying predictions, summarizing, checking goals, and evaluating strategy use.

All these strategies help postgraduates become aware of what strategies they are using, whether these strategies do help their learning. By being given opportunities to practice these strategies, they can know which one is suitable and can be transferred to other tasks.

It must be re-emphasized in conclusion that the issue of strategy training in second language acquisition is far from simple, and there are no simple solutions to the questions of how to promote efficient employment of strategies. The aim of strategy training in English learning lies not in the mastery of strategies but in heightening strategy awareness, in enlarging the range of strategies to be selected, and in enhancing the ability to self-monitor and self-regulate in the learning process. Most of important, metacognitive strategies—the core learning strategies, should be paid much more attention to in language teaching.

## **4. Conclusion**

Only through recognizing students’ learning motivation can teachers take applicable teaching methods and offer appropriate guidance or advice to students’ learning strategy. Different strategies may accommodate learning motivation.

Integral combination of motivation and strategy is a key to successful language learning, while ill-advised use of learning strategy will lead to failure. It is fitting that we can use a metaphor to describe the relationship between motivation, learning strategy and achievement as a conclusion:

If second language acquisition is a car and all the other factors are essential parts or components, the learners' motivation the fuel supplying the staying power and learning strategy will be the steering wheel deciding the direction and destination of the vehicle. Both of them are very important in accounting for individual difference in second language acquisition. Paying attention to them will teachers to map out more effective and ingenious teaching strategies.

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Table 1. Factors from various aspects influencing the process of second language acquisition

non-learner factors		learner factors		outcomes
environmental	institutional	unmodifiable	modifiable	English achievement
social economic cultural linguistic contexts Family background	school resources Teaching qualities Assessment method	intelligence aptitude sex age	learning purposes beliefs effort management strategies language learning strategies	
Presage	→	process	→	product



## EFL Students' *Yahoo!* Online Bilingual Dictionary Use Behavior

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### Abstract

This study examined 38 EFL senior high school students' *Yahoo!* online dictionary look-up behavior. In a language laboratory, the participants read an article on a reading sheet, underlined any words they did not know, looked up their unknown words in *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, and wrote down the definitions of their looked-up words. The participants' dictionary look-up records were collected, their look-up errors were categorized into four types, and their look-up behavior was interpreted through seven patterns. The results showed that some participants looked up a word in the dictionary without removing the inflection of it, looked up individual words instead of a fixed expression, did not make good use of the example sentences or phrases provided by the dictionary, or did not take the context into consideration when selecting an appropriate meaning for a word. Based on the students' online dictionary look-up errors and their dictionary-consulting behavior patterns, pedagogical implications concerning dictionary look-up instruction are raised and discussed.

**Keywords:** Online dictionary use behavior, Dictionary look-up errors

### 1. Introduction

Dictionaries are considered good companions to language learners, especially to second or foreign language learners because dictionaries can provide a quick and direct access to the meaning of an unknown word. In EFL contexts, the supporting role of dictionaries has been emphasized by both teachers and researchers (e.g., Bogaards, 1996), and the training of dictionary skills is considered important and necessary because EFL learners may not be able to make good use of dictionaries without explicit instruction (Fan, 2000; Su, 2003; Wright, 1998).

Nowadays with the easy and widespread access to the Internet, more and more EFL students begin to use online dictionaries when they encounter unknown words in their English learning tasks (Lan, 2005). It is mainly because online dictionaries, like electronic ones, can provide students with the information about the looked-up words with ease and speed. Given the fact that EFL students may frequently consult online dictionaries, examining their online dictionary look-up behavior may reveal *how* they interact with the online dictionary and even *how* they process the unknown words.

### 2. Background

Although there is pedagogical value in investigating EFL learners' dictionary use behavior, research in this regard is quite scant. Studies on EFL learners' dictionary use often center on issues such as their preferences of dictionary types (Diab & Hamdan, 1999; Liang, 2006), their purposes of consulting dictionaries (Atkins & Varantola, 1997; Liang, 2006; Su, 2003), and the piece(s) of information they had extracted from their dictionary consultations (Fan, 2000). In spite of the rare research in exploring the process of how EFL students consult dictionaries, there exist two such studies (Al-Ajmi, 2002; Nesi & Haill, 2002), both of which examined students' use of *paper* dictionaries by analyzing their look-up errors.

Al-Ajmi (2002) analyzed 46 EFL students' look-up errors in doing translation tasks, trying to detect some possible links between these errors and the structural features of two English-Arabic paper dictionaries. The errors he had found were categorized into three types, accompanied by several possible reasons (Al-Ajmi, 2002, p. 123):

#### 1) *Users' difficulties with dictionary information:*

(a) Failure to find the correct sense in a polysemous entry. (b) Failure to find the headword although it was there. (c) Searching in the wrong entry. (d) Selecting the wrong sub-sense. (e) Searching for proper nouns and foreign words. (f) Selecting the wrong synonym. (g) Choosing more than one equivalent (uncertainty). (h) Inability to recognize multiword expressions. (i) Selecting parts of explanation or equivalents.

#### 2) *Problematic macro- and microstructural features of the dictionary:*

(a) Missing or untranslated derivatives. (b) Lack of appropriate equivalents. (c) Missing senses. (d) Typeface size of Arabic equivalents.

### 3) *Difficulties resulting from interaction with the text:*

- (a) Misreading the problematic word. (b) Word division at line endings in English texts.

Nesi and Haill (2002) analyzed 89 EFL/ESL students' look-up errors in their use of several paper dictionaries to do reading assignments in a natural setting. They categorized students' errors into five types (Nesi & Haill, 2002, p. 282):

- 1) The subject chose the wrong dictionary entry or sub-entry.
- 2) The subject chose the correct dictionary entry or sub-entry but misinterpreted the information it contained.
- 3) The subject chose the correct dictionary entry or sub-entry, but did not realize that the word had a slightly different meaning in context.
- 4) The subject found the correct dictionary entry or sub-entry, but rejected it as inappropriate in context.
- 5) The word or appropriate word meaning was not in any of the dictionaries the subject consulted.

The above two studies demonstrate the difficulties that EFL students may encounter in using *paper* dictionaries. Although Nesi and Haill's (2002) classification of errors differed from that of Al-Ajmi's (2002), similar look-up difficulties were found in both studies. For example, the students had difficulty in selecting an appropriate meaning in a polysemous entry or they might select meanings from a wrong word entry due to their misidentification of the grammatical class of the looked-up word. Moreover, students' look-up errors might be attributed to the dictionaries because there were missing senses of the words in the dictionaries. These look-up error analysis studies may reveal students' lack of training in using dictionaries or be suggestive of their insufficient knowledge of the English language. Based on the errors students make and the difficulties they encounter in consulting dictionaries, teachers can provide proper instruction to students in the use of dictionaries.

Until now, there seems to be little research on examining how EFL learners use *online* dictionaries or to analyze their look-up errors in using *online* dictionaries. Given the growing popularity of online dictionaries among EFL learners (Lan, 2005), it would be of some pedagogical value to trace the process of their online dictionary use behavior and to find out their problems in using online dictionaries. In addition, by comparing the errors students' made in using *online* dictionaries and in using *paper* dictionaries, we can obtain a fuller picture of EFL learners' dictionary use behavior. In the EFL context in Taiwan, *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary (the English-Chinese version) is one of the most popular online dictionaries among students (Lee, 2008). Therefore, this study tried to preliminarily explore EFL students' *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary look-up behavior in doing a reading task. Specifically, two research questions were addressed:

- 1) What is EFL students' *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary use behavior? In order to answer this question, two sub-questions were examined. (a) What types of errors do students make in their online dictionary use? (b) What are these errors and non-errors suggestive of students' online dictionary look-up behavior?
- 2) What is EFL students' feedback on *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary?

## 3. The present study

### 3.1 Participants

The participants were 38 EFL students in a public senior high school in northern Taiwan. They were in their second year, their average age being 17. Among them, 19 were female and, 9, male. In particular, these EFL learners belonged to an English-gifted class in that school. Information from their English (also homeroom) teacher suggested that most of the students were English learners with high motivation, and their English proficiency was generally higher than their peers in other classes in the same school.

### 3.2 Instruments

#### 3.2.1 Yahoo! online bilingual dictionary (<http://tw.dictionary.yahoo.com>)

*Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary (English-Chinese or Chinese-English version) was chosen as the instrument to collect the participants' look-up records not only because it is very popular among students in Taiwan (Lee, 2008) but also because it has been used by 92% of the participants (35 students) in an informal survey before the study. Thus, examinations of students' use of the *Yahoo!* dictionary may reveal their general use of online dictionaries.

*Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary has three major functions (see Figure 1). Users can consult the meanings of English (or Chinese) words, scan the English words in alphabetical order, or submit a paragraph for translation. For meaning consultation, the dictionary provides information about a word's definitions, its synonyms and antonyms, derivatives, pronunciation, part of speech, example sentences, and some grammatical rules.

#### 3.2.2 Reading text

The reading text was entitled *Unlocking the Benefits of Garlic* (see Appendix A), taken from the New York Times

Website. The reason for selecting the reading text from this website was that the participants were regularly reading the news articles from the New York Times as supplementary materials prepared by their English teacher. Thus, using the text from the same material source would resemble their regular reading assignments. After the reading text was selected, it was sent to their English teacher for further examination. It was confirmed that the participants did not read the article before and that the article was difficult enough for the students and contained at least 20 words the participants did not know, which served well the dictionary look-up activity.

### 3.2.3 Questionnaire

A 7-item questionnaire was designed to investigate the students' feedback on *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary. The first three questions were in a 5-point Likert scale format, with 5 indicating *strongly agree* and 1, *strongly disagree*. They explored questions of whether students could use the dictionary to get the information they want, whether they were satisfied with the dictionary, and whether they would use it often. The last four questions were open-ended ones, which elicited students' responses to the actions they would take when a word has many definitions, the difficulties they encountered in using the dictionary, and their perceived strengths and weaknesses of the dictionary. The questionnaire was written in Chinese, the participants' L1. An English version of the questionnaire was shown in Appendix B, along with the results of the questionnaire.

### 3.3 Data collection procedure

This study was conducted in the senior high school's language laboratory, where every participant had access to the Internet, during one of the participants' regular English classes (50 minutes). The procedures were as follows. First, the students were informed of the purpose of this study, and then were reminded that the data collected in this study would not affect their English grade so as to lower their anxiety of poor performance. Second, a brief instruction in how to use the *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary was provided. Students were given time to set up their computer and practice with the online dictionary. Third, the sheets of the reading text were distributed to the students, and they were told to read the text first, and at the same time underline any English words they did not know. Fourth, the students looked up their own unknown words by using *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary for about 30 minutes. They were told to write down the words' parts of speech and their Chinese definitions in the blank space below the underlined English words on the reading sheet. In addition, if they could not find the word in the dictionary, they were told to report the failure. Finally, the students' reading sheets were collected, and they were asked to answer the questionnaire in Chinese.

### 3.4 Data analysis procedure

There were two sets of data in this study, namely, the look-up record data and the questionnaire data. Data of the participants' looked-up words were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. First, the number of the participants' looked-up words was calculated. Then, the looked-up words were calculated by participant and by item. Every looked-up word was keyed into the *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary by the researcher to retrieve its correct meaning. By comparing the results of the *Yahoo!* dictionary and the definitions provided by the participants, the look-up errors were identified. Finally, the identified errors were categorized into four types based on Al-Ajmi (2002) and Nesi and Haill (2002) for further interpretation.

The questionnaire data consisted of two parts: three 5-point Likert-scale items and four open-ended questions. First, responses to the Likert-scale items were tallied for their frequencies. Then, answers to the open-ended questions were coded by the researcher.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 The looked-up words

#### 4.1.1 Descriptives of the looked-up words

Descriptive statistics of the participants' looked-up words were shown in Table 1. Each participant looked up between 16 and 51 words, with an average of 31 words. There were a total of 1188 look-up records. Among the 1188 look-up records, 960 (81%) were correct look-ups while 228 (19%) were errors. Thus, the correct rate was 81%. This high correct rate may confirm the later questionnaire results (item 1) that most of the participants (92%) could use *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary to get the information they want. Among the total 1188 look-up records, 86 different words were looked up. The exact looked-up words were shown in Appendix C.

#### 4.1.2 Types of errors of the looked-up words

Based on the previous work on the analysis of EFL learners' paper dictionary look-up errors (Al-Ajmi, 2002; Nesi & Haill, 2002), the present 228 online dictionary look-up errors were categorized into four different types. Some examples of the four error types were shown in Table 2.

**Type A errors** were those look-up records with the definitions chosen from the wrong grammatical class. For example, the target word was a verb, but the participants selected definitions from the sub-entry of noun. This type of errors was

similar to Nesi and Haill's (2002) category-one problem; namely, the subject chose the wrong dictionary entry or sub-entry. 57 errors (25%) belonged to this type.

**Type B errors** were those look-up records with the correct grammatical class but the wrong definitions. That is, the participants chose the wrong item among different definitions for a word. This type of errors was similar to Al-Ajmi's (2002) category-one errors, in that participants failed to find the correct sense in a polysemous entry or selected the wrong sub-sense. 91 errors (40%) fell into this type.

**Type C errors** were those look-up records with both correct and incorrect definitions. In other words, the participants selected multiple definitions, with both correct and incorrect ones. Al-Ajmi (2002) also attributed some errors he had found to his category-one errors, indicating that some participants chose more than one equivalent out of uncertainty. There were 46 errors (20%) of this type.

**Type D errors** were those look-up records without appropriate definitions provided in the dictionary. Since there were no appropriate definitions provided, the participants then selected the inappropriate ones, resulting in type D errors. Both Al-Ajmi (2002) and Nesi and Haill (2002) have indicated such errors found in their studies. A total of 34 errors (15%) belonged to this type.

The distribution of these four types of errors was shown in Figure 2, which clearly demonstrated that Type B errors (40%) were the most errors made by the participants. This suggests that the participants, even though they were in an English-gifted class, had difficulties in retrieving meanings from a long list or a polysemous entry. Thus, the skill of how to select appropriate meanings in a dictionary entry should be explicitly taught to students.

Type A errors (25%) were also common among the participants. It may suggest that the participants had problems in identifying the part of speech of a word, thus selecting the definitions from the wrong grammatical class. This problem seemed to have little connection with the participants' dictionary look-up skills, but was more directly related to their knowledge of the English language. It is because students will have difficulties in selecting definitions from a correct grammatical class if they do not know the grammatical role the word plays in the sentence. Thus, the best way to help students eliminate Type A errors is to improve their knowledge about a word's grammatical role or part of speech in a sentence.

It should be noted that although Type C errors accounted for 20% of the total errors, not every participant made such errors. Only 12 participants (32%) made this type of errors, and among them, one participant made 20 errors among the total 46 errors. This particular student may either have a serious problem in selecting the most appropriate meaning from a list of candidates, or did not take context into consideration when doing the task. He or she may also be uncertain or insecure about choosing one definition for a word.

In this study, there was only one looked-up word (i.e., *tout*) whose appropriate definition was not provided in the dictionary. But there were 34 participants (89%) looking up this word, so Type D errors could account for 15% of the total errors.

#### 4.2 Patterns of participants' look-up behavior

By examining both the correct look-ups and the errors the participants had made, we could obtain seven patterns of their *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary look-up behavior. First, *most of the participants read beyond the first definition of an entry to retrieve meanings*. This could be seen from the fact that some correct or incorrect definitions were in the third or even later item on the list, and the participants had selected them. This may suggest that they were cautious in choosing appropriate meanings, even though sometimes they still made errors.

Second, *some participants did follow-up consultation provided by the dictionary*. For example, the Chinese definition of the word *hummus* did not appear in the entry *hummus*, which was the word shown in the reading text, but the dictionary provided a link to *houmous*, and in this entry the definition of *hummus* was provided (see Figure 3). Eight participants (21%) had looked up this word, and all of them had followed the link and got the appropriate definition of *hummus*.

Third, *some participants did not remove the inflection of a word to recover the form, and looked up the word with its inflection in the dictionary*. This behavior could be seen from the error they made when searching for the definition of the word *transmits*. The word *transmits* was a verb in the reading text, but some participants got an inappropriate noun definition (*direct broadcast satellite*) for the verb *transmit*, which suggests that the participants had keyed in the verb with its inflection. If the participants had removed the inflection *-s*, and had keyed in the verb *transmit* for inquiry, they might not have made an error like this (see Figure 4). This behavior not only accounted for several Type A errors, but also showed that the participants were not familiar with the parts of speech of the words they looked up. Furthermore, this behavior demonstrated that there is a big difference between the *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary and paper dictionaries. In the online dictionary, students can retrieve the meaning of a word with inflections. By doing so, sometimes they can get the correct definitions, but sometimes they cannot. In paper dictionaries, students can only locate the word after they remove the inflection of that word. This difference might partially account for the

participants' responses to the questionnaire (item 6) that one of the strengths of the online dictionary is "its convenient to use" because they can just type in words with inflections and get the meanings immediately. But whether this function or characteristic of *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary (i.e., words can be consulted without their inflections removed) is beneficial to students deserves more scrutiny. It might be possible that if students cannot get the look-up results of a word with its inflection on, they will begin to notice the part of speech of the word which they are not aware of before, and re-consult the word with its bare form in the dictionary. If this is so, then the "convenient" function of the *Yahoo!* online dictionary may be a hindrance rather than an aid to students' learning. Yet, this pattern of students' look-up behavior revealed the need for instruction in the dictionary-consulting skills.

Fourth, *some participants did not make good use of the example sentences or phrases the dictionary provided*. Such behavior might result in Type A and Type B errors. As Figure 5 demonstrated, had the participants seen the example phrase of *clove*, they would have chosen the appropriate meaning instead of the inappropriate one because the example phrase was closely related to the reading topic, *garlic*. 22 participants (58%) had looked up this word, and only half of them had chosen the correct definition.

Fifth, *most of the participants looked up individual words instead of phrases*. That is, the participants did not recognize the multiword expressions and only looked up the meanings of the individual words in the reading text. Similar look-up behavior was also found in Al-Ajmi's (2002) study. There were three examples of such behavior in this study. The first was the phrase *oil refining*. Although there were 25 students (66%) looking up the word *refining*, only two students consulted the phrase *oil refining*, the meaning of which was provided in the dictionary. The second example was the phrase *per capita*. 25 participants (66%) retrieved the meaning of the word *capita*, but no participants looked up the phrase *per capita*, the meaning of which was also provided in the dictionary. The third example was the phrase *hydrogen sulfide*. 19 participants (50%) looked up the word *hydrogen*, and 37 participants (97%) looked up the word *sulfide*. But there were no clues of whether the participants had tried to look up the phrase *hydrogen sulfide* since the meaning of the phrase was not provided in the dictionary. Judging from the participants' reading sheets, it seemed that the participants did not recognize this phrase because all of them underlined the two words separately and none of them reported any failure of not finding the phrase in the online dictionary.

Sixth, *some participants felt uncertain or insecure about only one definition, and tried to provide multiple definitions, which turned out to include both correct and incorrect ones*. This behavior resulted in all the Type C errors. Similar errors also appeared in Al-Ajmi's (2002) study where the students chose more than one equivalent out of uncertainty.

Seventh, *some participants did not take the context into consideration when selecting an appropriate meaning for a word*. This behavior resulted in many Type A and Type B errors. This behavior was in conflict with their responses to the questionnaire (item 4), in which they reported that when a word has many definitions, they would choose the appropriate meaning based on the context. This mismatch between their belief and behavior might be partially due to their limited time (only about 30 minutes) to consult the online dictionary. It is possible that if they had been given more time to examine every definition of a word or to check the context of that word, they would have made fewer errors. Whether this speculation is true deserves further investigation.

#### 4.3 Results of the questionnaire

Results of the questionnaire revealed the participants' feedback on the *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary. The first three Likert-type items showed that most of the participants (92%) agreed that they could use *Yahoo!* dictionary to get the information they want, and a lot of them (76%) were satisfied with the dictionary. However, only about half of the participants (52%) reported that they would use the online dictionary often. This may be due to the fact that these students could not get access to the Internet whenever and wherever they wanted. In a classroom setting, an electronic or a paper dictionary may be more convenient to them. In addition, since the participants who were satisfied with the dictionary were fewer than those who could use it to get the needed information, it may suggest that "access to word information" may not be the only criterion they asked of the *Yahoo!* online dictionary. "Qualities of the information" may also be important to the participants as could be inferred from the weaknesses of the dictionary (item 7) they had pointed out.

When asked what they would do when a word had many definitions, many participants (71%) mentioned that they would check the context and then choose an appropriate definition from the long list. Some participants (24%) also indicated that they would go through every definition and select the most appropriate one. These responses suggest that they would not randomly choose a definition from a word entry, and that they would pay attention to the context of a word to select meaning for that word. But as their look-up error analyses showed, some participants did not pay attention to the context in which the looked-up word located, and thus they made several Type A and Type B errors.

When asked about the difficulties they had encountered in using *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, some participants (32%) mentioned that the target words they were searching for could not be found in the dictionary, and some (29%) indicated that it was difficult to select an appropriate definition because there were many definitions of a word. In terms



of the strengths of *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, some participants (34%) mentioned that it was convenient to use the dictionary, and some (29%) mentioned that it was fast to find the word meanings in the dictionary. These strengths were similar to those of electronic dictionaries pointed out by the EFL learners in the previous research (Koren, 1997; Liang, 2006; Tang, 1997). "Ease and speed" are always considered two major advantages of the technological dictionaries over the traditional paper ones. Concerning the weaknesses of *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, some participants (29%) pointed out that the word bank of the dictionary was not big enough because they could not find the words they wanted in the dictionary. Another weakness mentioned by some participants (21%) was that the dictionary did not provide enough example sentences, and that some words even had no example sentences. This weakness demonstrates that these EFL learners may consider example sentences important in learning the meaning of a word; yet some of them did not seem to make good use of the example sentences as their error of the word *clove* showed in this study. It was interesting to find that some participants (21%) plainly stated that *Yahoo!* dictionary had no weaknesses. These participants might be those who were satisfied with the dictionary or those who did not find difficulties in using it.

## 5. Conclusion

This study mainly explored EFL students' *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary use behavior in a reading task. The participants' look-up errors were categorized into four types, and their look-up behavior was portrayed in seven patterns. Compared with the previous studies, it was found that no matter what types of dictionaries (i.e., paper or online dictionaries) EFL students used, there were some similarities in their look-up errors. This suggests that it is necessary to provide EFL students with some instruction in dictionary use skills regardless of what types of dictionaries they use.

### 5.1 Pedagogical implications

Scholfield (1982) has already provided seven look-up procedures for paper dictionaries. Yet the following general dictionary consultation instruction may still be beneficial to EFL learners based on the results of this study. First, *teach students to remove the inflection of a word, if any, and look up the canonical or original form in the dictionary*. This skill is essential because some EFL students may not be aware of the fact that the word they are going to look up is inflected. This training may need to be combined with some grammar instruction concerning the grammatical role the target word plays in a sentence. Second, *train students to make good use of the other features of a word the dictionary provides in addition to the definitions of a word*. Some dictionaries may provide the example sentences, phrases, or collocations of a word. If students can make use of these extra features, they will be more likely to choose the appropriate definition of their looked-up word. Moreover, the phrases or collocations provided in the dictionary may reveal to students that the word they are looking up is part of a fixed expression, and that they had better consult the whole phrase or multi-word expression in the dictionary instead of looking them up individually. Third, *teach students to take context into consideration if the target word appears in context*. Usually, a word will have many definitions, and resorting to the contextual clues is the best way to select the appropriate meaning from a list of definitions provided in the dictionary. Training students to "situate the target word in context" can also help them lower their uncertainty of the appropriate meanings of a word and thus lessen their chances of choosing more than one definitions for a word which are not synonymous among themselves.

In addition to the above dictionary use instruction, it should be recognized that students' dictionary look-up behavior will also be affected by the design of the dictionaries. For instance, students can retrieve the meaning of a word with inflections in *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, but they have to remove the inflection of a word before looking it up in paper dictionaries. Therefore, in order to teach students how to make good use of dictionaries, teachers should, in advance, familiarize themselves with the designs or macro- and microstructures of different types of dictionaries so that they can detect and help students solve some potential problems in using the dictionaries.

### 5.2 Limitations of the present study and suggestions for further research

Although this study has contributed a little to our understanding of how EFL learners use *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary, it still has limitations. First, the participants in this study were students in an English-gifted class. Their behavior of online dictionary use may not be generalized to other groups of EFL learners. Thus, future studies can examine the behavior of dictionary use of students in a regular class or of students with different English proficiency levels. Second, the dictionary used in this study was *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary (the English-Chinese and Chinese-English version). Due to the different design of each online dictionary, the results of this study may not be generalized to learners' behavior of using other online dictionaries. Further research can explore how EFL learners consult other online dictionaries, bilingual or even monolingual. Third, the reading task in this study did not include any post-reading comprehension questions because of two reasons. For one, the focus of this study was the examination of the process of students' dictionary look-up behavior, not their comprehension of the reading text. For the other, the whole experimental design was to replicate the participants' regular reading assignments in which they were not asked to answer any reading comprehension questions but were required to look up in dictionaries any unknown words they encountered in the reading materials. However, it might be possible that students would have a different pattern of

dictionary look-up behavior if they are required to do some post-reading comprehension questions. Whether this assumption is true or not deserves further investigation. Fourth, due to time constraint on the availability of the language laboratory where every participant could have access to the Internet, the time allotment for online dictionary consultation in this study was only about 30 minutes. It may not be long enough for the students to either examine every definition of an entry or to check which definition fitted the word's context. Future studies should take time allotment into consideration if replication of the design of this study is pursued.

### 5.3 Concluding remarks

In sum, EFL learners' dictionary use behavior is worth exploring. It is because their dictionary use behavior often reveals their understanding of the English language. By examining the students' look-up errors, teachers can know what their difficulties in learning English are, and can provide more appropriate instruction to them. Thus, more research is needed in investigating how learners use dictionaries. Given the growing popularity of online dictionaries among EFL learners, studies on learners' use of online dictionaries are highly recommended because they will have great pedagogical value on English teaching and learning in EFL contexts.

### Acknowledgments

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### Appendix A. Reading text

#### Unlocking the Benefits of Garlic

Garlic has long been touted as a health booster, but it's never been clear why the herb might be good for you. Now new research is beginning to unlock the secrets of the odoriferous bulb.

In a study published today in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, researchers show that eating garlic appears to boost our natural supply of hydrogen sulfide. Hydrogen sulfide is actually poisonous at high concentrations—it's the same noxious byproduct of oil refining that smells like rotten eggs. But the body makes its own supply of the stuff, which acts as an antioxidant and transmits cellular signals that relax blood vessels and increase blood flow.

In the latest study, performed at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, researchers extracted juice from

supermarket garlic and added small amounts to human red blood cells. The cells immediately began emitting hydrogen sulfide, the scientists found.

The power to boost hydrogen sulfide production may help explain why a garlic-rich diet appears to protect against various cancers, including breast, prostate and colon cancer, say the study authors. Higher hydrogen sulfide might also protect the heart, according to other experts. Although garlic has not consistently been shown to lower cholesterol levels, researchers at Albert Einstein College of Medicine earlier this year found that injecting hydrogen sulfide into mice almost completely prevented the damage to heart muscle caused by a heart attack.

“People have known garlic was important and has health benefits for centuries,” said Dr. David W. Kraus, associate professor of environmental science and biology at the University of Alabama. “Even the Greeks would feed garlic to their athletes before they competed in the Olympic games.”

Now, the downside. The concentration of garlic extract used in the latest study was equivalent to an adult eating about two medium-sized cloves per day. In such countries as Italy, Korea and China, where a garlic-rich diet seems to be protective against disease, per capita consumption is as high as eight to 12 cloves per day.

While that may sound like a lot of garlic, Dr. Kraus noted that increasing your consumption to five or more cloves a day isn't hard if you use it every time you cook. Dr. Kraus also makes a habit of snacking on garlicky dishes like hummus with vegetables.

Many home chefs mistakenly cook garlic immediately after crushing or chopping it, added Dr. Kraus. To maximize the health benefits, you should crush the garlic at room temperature and allow it to sit for about 15 minutes. That triggers an enzyme reaction that boosts the healthy compounds in garlic.

Garlic can cause indigestion, but for many, the bigger concern is that it can make your breath and sweat smell like...garlic. While individual reactions to garlic vary, eating fennel seeds like those served at Indian restaurants helps to neutralize the smell. Garlic-powder pills claim to solve the problem, but the data on these supplements has been mixed. It's still not clear if the beneficial compounds found in garlic remain potent once it's been processed into a pill.

(Source: <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/10/15/unlocking-the-benefits-of-garlic>)

## Appendix B. Results of the questionnaire

5: Strongly agree 4: Agree 3: Neutral 2: Disagree 1: Strongly disagree

		5	4	3	2	1
1.	I can use <i>Yahoo!</i> online bilingual dictionary to get the information I want.	11 (29%)	<b>24</b> (63%)	3 (8%)	0	0
2.	I am satisfied with <i>Yahoo!</i> online bilingual dictionary.	2 (5%)	<b>27</b> (71%)	7 (18%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
3.	I will use <i>Yahoo!</i> online bilingual dictionary often.	7 (18%)	<b>13</b> (34%)	<b>13</b> (34%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)
4.	<i>In using Yahoo! online bilingual dictionary, when a word has many definitions, I will:</i> Check the context: <b>27</b> (71%) Go through every definition: 9 (24%)		See the example sentence: 1 (3%) Consult other dictionaries: 1 (3%)			
5.	<i>The difficulties I encounter when using Yahoo! online bilingual dictionary:</i> Target words not included: <b>12</b> (32%) Many definitions of a word: <b>11</b> (29%) No difficulties: 8 (21%) Unsure of the correctness of the definition: 1 (3%)		Pronunciation not clear: 1 (3%) Not comfortable with computer: 1 (3%) Slow keying in speed: 4 (11%)			
6.	<i>I think the strengths of Yahoo! online bilingual dictionary are:</i> Convenient to use: <b>13</b> (34%) Fast to find the words: <b>11</b> (29%) Providing example sentences: 6 (16%) Clear definitions: 5 (13%) Providing sounds of the words: 3 (8%)		Providing many definitions: 3 (8%) Words in big font: 2 (5%) Providing word roots: 1 (3%) Many functions: 1 (3%) No advantages: 1 (3%)			
7.	<i>I think the weaknesses of Yahoo! online bilingual dictionary are:</i> Target words not included: <b>11</b> (29%) Example sentences not enough: <b>8</b> (21%) No weaknesses: <b>8</b> (21%) Too concise: 3 (8%) Definitions not enough: 2 (5%) Few compound words: 2 (5%) Slow speed of dictionary processing: 1 (3%)		Few phrases: 1 (3%) Bad example sentences: 1 (3%) Too boring: 1 (3%) Too monotonous: 1 (3%) Too many information: 1 (3%) Hurting eyes: 1 (3%)			

**Appendix C. Words looked-up by the participants**

No.	F	No.	F	No.	F
1. antioxidant	38	31. injecting	18	61. garlic	3
odoriferous	37	boost	16	snacking	3
sulfide	37	individual	16	stuff	3
booster	36	potent	16	associate	2
emitting	35	supplements	16	athletes	2
noxious	35	unlock	15	centuries	2
prostate	35	proceedings	13	crushing	2
cholesterol	34	vessels	13	data	2
colon	34	breast	11	oil refining	2
touted	34	consistently	11	Olympic	2
11. cellular	33	41. flow	11	71. powder	2
enzyme	32	herb	11	seeds	2
equivalent	31	hummus	8	vary	2
bulb	30	Academy	7	added	1
byproduct	30	Birmingham	7	chopping	1
triggers	30	signals	7	concern	1
extracted	28	supply	7	Einstein	1
compounds	26	chefs	6	feed	1
concentrations	26	reaction	6	increase	1
capita	25	rotten	6	mice	1
21. indigestion	25	51. various	6	81. per	1
neutralize	25	Alabama	5	processed	1
refining	25	amounts	5	protective	1
consumption	24	cells	5	Sciences	1
fennel	24	maximize	5	served	1
transmits	24	pills	5	sit	1
cloves	22	damage	4	<b>Total: 1188</b>	
downside	22	extract	4		
poisonous	21	garlicky	4		
hydrogen	19	mistakenly	4		

Note: 1. The words are presented in the original forms as appearing in the reading text.

2. F = Frequency

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Looked-up Words

(N= 38)	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	S.D.
Total look-ups	16	51	1188	31.3	6.6
Correct	8	34	960	25.3	6.4
Incorrect	1	24	228	6.0	4.2

Table 2. Examples of the Four Error Types

Error type	Looked-up word	Correct definition	Incorrect definition (Participant's error)
A	trigger	v. 引起 (to cause)	n. 刺激物 (stimulant)
B	clove	n. 小鳞莖 (any of the small bulbs into which a larger bulb can be divided)	n. 丁香 (the flower of a tropical Asian plant)
C	cellular	adj. 細胞組成的 (consisting of cells)	adj. 細胞組成的 ; 多孔的 (consisting of cells; having many holes)
D	tout	v. 吹噓、吹捧 (to praise greatly)	v. 招徠顧客、兜售 (to try repeatedly to persuade people to buy one's goods, use one's services, etc.)

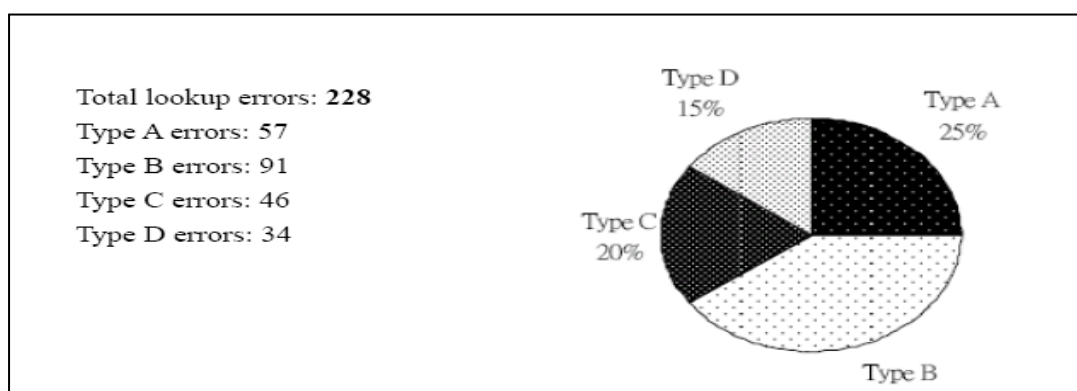
Figure 1. Screenshot of *Yahoo!* online bilingual dictionary

Figure 2. Distribution of four error types

Figure 3. Screenshots of *hummus* and *houmous*

### Retrieval of *transmit*

1. 傳遞, 傳達  
I will **transmit** the money by special messenger.  
我將專門派人送這筆錢。
2. 傳(光、熱、聲等); 傳動  
They are trying to find a better way of **transmitting** energy.  
他們正試圖尋找一種更好的轉能方法。
3. 遺傳; 留傳[(+to)]  
Genes are **transmitted** from one generation to another.  
基因代代相傳。
4. 發射; 播發[(+to)]  
The message was **transmitted** by radio.  
這消息是用無線電發送的。
5. 傳播; 傳染[(+to)]  
Rats **transmit** disease.  
老鼠傳播鼠疫。

### Retrieval of *transmits*

transmits

直播衛星

1. [Communication] Direct Broadcast Satellite (abbreviated as DBS, which refers to a satellite that transmits television signals that can be picked up directly by a home viewer)

Figure 4. Screenshots of *transmit* and *transmits*

**clove<sup>1</sup>**

即時發音

看漢科技提供

KK: [kloʊ]  
DJ: [klaʊv]  
n. (名詞 noun)[C]

1. 丁香; 乾丁香花苞
2. 丁香樹

**clove<sup>2</sup>**

即時發音

看漢科技提供

KK: [kloʊ]  
DJ: [klaʊv]  
n. (名詞 noun)

1. 
**【植】小鱗莖[C]**  
a **clove** of garlic  
一瓣大蒜

Figure 5. Screenshot of *clove*



## Universal Semantics in Translation

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### Abstract

What and how we translate are questions often argued about. No matter what kind of answers one may give, priority in translation should be granted to meaning, especially those meanings that exist in all concerned languages. In this paper the author defines them as universal sememes, and the study of them as universal semantics, of which applications are also briefly looked into.

**Keywords:** Universal semantics, Translation, Universal sememe

### 1. Introduction

Professionals in translation have been setting standards, demonstrating skills and designing courses for this work, with a purpose in mind to protect newcomers from “falling over the parapet into limbo”(Firth, 1957, p.197). However, do the protected get to know clearly how to translate or what to translate, after a long odyssey through experiences or academic training and having maintained considerably satisfactory performance? It might be hard to answer such questions even if they are asked of some of the protectors themselves in that the process of translation is far from an exclusively formal one of seeking after a series of equivalence at various levels and then lining up the materials in another order. The latter surely proves to be preliminary and helpful for cultivating translators, but cannot be so for cultivating translation theories. One of the further steps approaching translation as a branch of science is to identify the nature and laws in it, which surely will intensify translation training ultimately.

### 2. The Role of Meaning in Translation

When the ancient Romans of the third century BC translated from Greek and the former Chinese of Tang Dynasty translated from Sanskrit, they meant to obtain knowledge about cultures of other peoples speaking different languages, not to appreciate the exotic accent itself. And we know that the carrier of knowledge is meaning and that of meaning more often than not some more concrete things. When we start to explore a language, it is usually “from the standpoint of how it creates and expresses meaning.” (Halliday, 2004, p.19) Though it seems that meaning is so vague, insubstantial, and elusive that it is impossible to come to any clear, concrete, or tangible conclusions about it, meaning usually is the only thing that may survive the handling of a tertiary translator. Therefore, it is more touchable than anything else for such a research to start with.

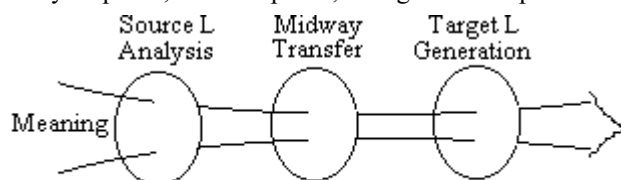
Then what do we mean by translation? By its nature, translation refers to a kind of transference between linguistic forms, or process of putting it “in other words” as Mona Baker (2000, p.53) pictured it. Generally, translation in a narrow sense is taken as interlingual transference from one language into another, while in a broad sense can be inter-symbol transference from one form whether linguistic or nonlinguistic into another. Theoretically and mathematically, translation activities may be regarded as computational process, and the transference may take the form of functional formulas as follows.

**Formula 1:**  $M = f(L)$

**Formula 2:**  $L' = f'(M)$

In the first formula, M stands for meaning, L for source language, and f is the set of formal rules for source language. In the second formula, L' stands for target language, M for meaning, and f' is the set of formal rules for target language. And M remains the same in both formulas. The whole course of the two formulas in a sequence as  $f(L) \Rightarrow M \Rightarrow f'(M) \Rightarrow L'$  represents the realization of M's formal transference from L into L'. The value domain of Formula 1 equals the definition domain of Formula 2; the definition domain of Formula 1 and the value domain of Formula 2 overlap with each other. The context of this sequence, i.e. the process of translation, is the union set of the definition domain of Formula 1 and the value domain of Formula 2. In condition that L equals L', f and f' are opposite functions mutually. One point that deserves our attention is that the above-mentioned functions will not necessarily give a unique value for a single variable and by no means hold a feature of monotony for connections between formulations and meanings of language are always so complex and multi-hierarchical, no matter within one or among more languages, that no one-to-one-valued mapping will exist. (Note: According to the assumptions, there is at least one value for each variable.)

Henceforward in this research, ideal translation will be venturously defined as the alternation between linguistic formulations that carry the same meaning, the object of translation as various forms in natural languages, and the role of meaning in translation as that of settings and criterions. Take Picture 1 as an illustration of the ideal transference process. As we know, the course of translation may be logically divided into three phases, just for the sake of analytic convenience, i.e. analysis phase, transfer phase, and generation phase. In a perfect product of translation meaning is

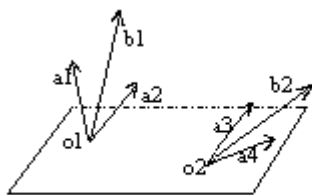


**Picture 1: Perfect Translition**

bound to have survived these three phases, and it is omnipresent in such a process.

### 3. Universal Semantics

In fact meaning does not indwell omnipresently in the process of translation for no other reason than being arbitrarily defined as, and on the contrary it is one part of the immediate aftermath of semantic universality. In accordance with social properties of language, the synchronic linguistic appearance comes directly from the combination of individual linguistic vectors, which have magnitude and direction. In theory there has to be a common exerting point for every two



**Picture 2: Synchronic Plane of Language**

vectors, and consequently all the vector exerting points form a synchronic plane that is relatively quiescent during the course of language development (See Picture 2). In Picture 2 a1, a2, a3 and a4 stand for some of the individual vectors, b1 and b2 are some of the compositional vectors, and o1 and o2 represent some of the exerting points. It is absolutely on the basis of the universal connotational acceptability from this synchronic plane that people speaking the language are able to perform linguistic communications.

However, translation activities are intercultural as well as interlingual, so settings of them will not be as easy to identify. Yet it sounds reasonable that there is also a hypothetical synchronic plane for different languages in our mind when undertaking the task. Connotations of the semantic items belonging to this plane will be the same or similar, and readers of our translation products will apprehend the spirit of other cultures, provided that we form the accurate plane as comprehensive basis. (Coincidentally people speaking pidgin seem to have something like this in mind unconsciously.) Therefore the substantial basis of translation is universality in languages, not the universality of formulations or patterns, but that of most semantic items. Thus the author hereby takes the liberty of putting forward a bold idea concerning translation — Universal Semantics.

Everything under the sun in this world experiences events of birth, growth, decline and death consecutively, which is surely true of language. All languages, no matter natural or artificial, come into being and evolve little by little as a result of certain requirements from its users, and have disappeared or will withdraw from people's linguistic realm upon the extinction of requirements or the users themselves. But human language as a whole has always been evolving along with the development of human society, from the time when the first string of sounds that carried meaning was out of somebody's mouth. During the course of this evolvement the decisive and dominant role is at all time played by the pragmatic needs of human beings, which turned out to be semantic components when reflected in the concrete objectivity of language. The same or similar subjective and objective conditions, namely the psyche unity of mankind and the substantial unity of external environment, for the origination and development of various languages, lead to the common foundation of their existence, and this foundation in turn puts forth universal connotations in all languages.

As early as in the seventeenth century Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz and some other rationalistic thinkers had already begun the discussion on semantic primitives. In recent years a group of linguists including Zolkovskij and Wierzbicka systematically proposed a theory about natural semantic primitives for meta-language. The theory starts with the search for semantic primitives, which stand for those concepts "which can be understood without any definitions, and in terms of which all other concepts can be defined" (Wierzbicka, 1992, p.403). Examples for semantic primitives are words like "you", "I", and "this", which are difficult to be interpreted or defined. In fact, even if we managed to do this, the interpretation or definition would be either a vicious circle or a fuzzy explanation. And the objective of the research ab



initio is to “avoid circularity” in linguistic interpretation (Geeraerts, 1994, p.3804). Although the set of semantic primitives in the so-called meta-language is so small a collection that its size has not been agreed on, the theory, together with its universal grammar, namely the valency of semantic primitives, contains considerable potentiality in linguistic description and interpretation. The proposal of this theory about semantic primitives stands out as a great breakthrough in the development of semantics and linguistics. And the primitives might well be regarded as the fascinating original variables in the linguistic axiom system that have been longed for by many western linguists, if further tested by practice. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to apply such theory naturally to the analysis of everyday lingual exchanges. No semantic research could afford leaving out the complexity of natural meaning, whereas the meta-language theory doubtlessly widens the gap between simple and compound semantic terms by interpreting all the semantic terms with semantic primitives, and consequently makes the work of language processing much more complicated for translation.

Actually, besides a core composed of primitives, among various natural languages there are still many other commonly shared items that are relatively more complicated than and can be defined or interpreted with semantic primitives. These items will be labeled as universal sememes in this paper, and the meaning contained in universal sememes labeled as universal meaning or universality, which lies universally in all kinds of languages and composes the formerly mentioned synchronic plane. All this may serve as the theoretical foundation of universal semantics.

Universal meaning refers to mental linguistic reflection of all matters, events, states, procedures and manners by language subjects, usually by human brains. When accommodated by varied componential units, e.g. phonemes, lexicons, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourses, of different layers in language, universal meaning takes the forms of universal sememes of different levels. Higher-leveled universal sememes are composed of lower-leveled universal sememes, but the former are absolutely not equal to sheer mix-ups of the latter. Actually they are monolithic combinations of lower-leveled ones fabricated together as integrative ingredients. For instance, compounds, phrases and sentences are all constructed in this way. The semantic value of a universal sememe of higher level can be equal to, larger or smaller than, or definitely different from the sum-up semantic value of all its composing lower-leveled ones. And as a result, the combining patterns, by which higher-leveled sememes are produced, or grammar rules as traditionally called, are provided with a capacity of carrying meanings. Therefore we may divide fundamental universal sememes into two classes, i.e. conceptual and structural universal sememes. Conceptual universal sememes are lingual abstractions from single matters, events, states, procedures or manners, while structural universal sememes are abstractions from lingual relations between matters, events, states, procedures and manners. A conceptual universal sememe is a set of external lingual forms representing the same universal meaning, e.g. {I, Я, わたし}, {America, Америка, アメリカ}; a structural universal sememe is just a standard name for a structural pattern, e.g. {noun}, {subject}, {sequence}, so on and so forth. Higher-leveled or compound universal sememes all consist of some fundamental ones from the two classes, of which conceptual ones are segmental and independent, while structural ones are attached to conceptual ones, hence dependent and super-segmental. However, some universal sememes may take different forms in different languages, for example, some structural sememes of tense and question in English may turn out to be conceptual ones of temporal and interrogative empty words when occurring in Chinese.

Furthermore, universality isn't a definite notion, but a rather fuzzy concept, since it would sound quite irrational if we regard the meaning that can be located in 100 kinds of natural languages as universal and meanwhile deny that in 99 this title. Alternatively we may conceive that the meaning in 100 is certainly more universal than one only in 99. All universal sememes make up a fuzzy set, which takes all the semantic items that occur in human language as elements. When we regard human language as the universal background for discussion, namely the universal domain  $U$ , and the collection of meaning-carrying linguistic units as a fuzzy subset  $A$  of  $U$ , then elements of Set  $A$  can be determined by a mapping function  $\mu$  that stands for the diversity in degree of universality, and Mapping  $\mu$  is the membership function of Fuzzy Set  $A$  on Domain  $U$ . For this function, the definition domain is the collection of all semantic items in human language, and the value domain is  $(0, 1]$ . Hereafter in this paper universal sememes may be defined in a mathematical way as follows:

**Definition:** Given a mapping  $\mu$  on the universal domain  $U$ , and

$$\mu: U \longrightarrow (0, 1],$$

thus  $\mu$  fixes a fuzzy subset of  $U$ , noted as  $A$ . And  $\mu$  is called the membership function of  $A$ , noted as  $\mu A(x)$ , which indicates the qualification of one element  $x$  as a member of Set  $A$ .

Since it is likely that  $\mu$  assumes all values continuously in the half-open and half-closed zone of  $(0, 1]$ , all semantic items that exist in human language are universal sememes of certain degree of universality. To what kind of degree an item is universal is determined by the corresponding value of the membership function with the item itself as the variable. The most universal semantic items are those with 1 as their membership value, mainly including: semantic primitives, e.g. {you}, {I}, {this}, and {that}; most semantic terms representing human common cognition, e.g. {high}, {low}, {red}, {black}, {man}, and {dog}; proper nouns, e.g. {Beijing}, {UN}, {Thomas Edison}, and {Fujisan}; some

structural universal sememes, e.g. {subject}, {agent}, {passiveness}, and {adjective}. The least universal are those semantic items that occur only in one kind of language, such as the words Eskimos use to describe the colors of snow melting to different extent, the membership value of which is close to zero. And membership values of other universal sememes are irregularly distributed between those of the two above-mentioned particular cases.

#### 4. Foundation of Translation

It is one of the most important premises for all translation activities to acknowledge the universality of some meanings in natural languages. Although transference based on the fuzzy set **A** has proved one indispensable procedure for the whole process, we actually take a certain subset of **A** as ground sill instead of translating on the basis of set **A** as a whole. If translation takes place among all human languages, i.e. **U** serves as the universal domain, the most adaptive foundation should be one of **A**'s subset, noted as **A**<sub>1</sub>, which consists of all elements whose membership value is 1, for reason that all the other elements can be defined or interpreted as combinations of these fundamental ones in some given patterns. Now, if translation takes place among **n** languages ( $n=2,3,4,\dots$ ), in turn the most adaptive foundation of translation will become more extensive. It then includes not only the elements whose membership value is 1 also some ones universal only in these languages and with a membership value less than 1, and we may note this subset of **A** as **A** $\lambda$  ( $\lambda < 1$ ), e.g. **A**<sub>0.9</sub>, **A**<sub>0.8</sub>, etc. When translating among certain number of languages, we need not know about the semantic universality of any other language or even its existence in this world, so the universal domain is no longer the set **U** of all human languages but a subset of **U**, and in accordance the previous interceptive set **A** $\lambda$  of **A** becomes **A**<sub>1</sub> in the new universal domain. Elements of **A**<sub>1</sub> occur in all concerned languages, they are the basic ingredients of them.

#### 5. Conclusions

Universal semantics may find its practical significance in many fields, such as translation training, arts of translation, machine translation (Tennant, 1981, p.21), and even L2/3 acquisition. As for translation training and arts, we suggest a course emphasized both the target and source languages, and a method of interpreting in source language beforehand. In regard to machine translation and L2/3 acquisition, meaning-centered approaches might be preferable.

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## Project-Based Learning in the Teaching of English as A Foreign Language in Greek Primary Schools: From Theory to Practice

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### Abstract

This article deals with implementing project work in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek state primary schools. Theoretical foundations for project-based learning are presented and applied in the classroom, difficulties encountered are discussed, and benefits resulting from student participation in project work are suggested. The article purports to be pragmatic in focus, linking theory with practice, and providing practitioners with a tool for effectively implementing project-based learning in foreign language contexts.

**Keywords:** Project-based learning, English as foreign language in Greece

### 1. Introduction

Experiential learning refers to the organization of the learning process on the basis of the pedagogical principle of “learning by doing”, which means that learners acquire knowledge after having experienced or done something new (Kotti, 2008:32). Experiential learning is defined as the exploitation and processing of experience, aiming not only at acquiring knowledge, but also at transforming the way of thinking and changing attitudes (Mezirow, 1991). In experiential learning learners participate “in concrete activities that enable them to ‘experience’ what they are learning about” and the “opportunity to reflect on those activities” (Silberman, 2007:8), since “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984).

Experiential learning is related to the project method. The project method is “a natural extension of what is already taking place in class” (Stoller, 2002:109), an open learning process, the limits and processes of which are not strictly defined, which progresses in relation to the specific teaching context and learners’ needs and interests. (Frey, 1986; Kriwas, 2007).

The project method originates from Pragmatism, the philosophical movement which appeared in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and promotes action and practical application of knowledge in everyday life (Frey, 1986:31). Major proponents of Pragmatism are J. Dewey (1935) and W. Kilpatrick (1935) in the U.S.A, and H.Gaudig and G. Kerschensteiner in Germany.

The implementation of the project method was based on the following pedagogical principles, expressed by many progressive educators (Chrysafidis, 2005): a) promotion of manual activity instead of memorization and verbalism, b) learners’ active participation in the learning process, and c) exploitation of facts relating to the immediate reality as a source for learning.

The project method was linked to the internal reform of the educational process, basic components of which are the following: a) opening of school to the local community, b) provision of equal opportunities to all students regardless of socioeconomic background, c) exploitation of immediate space as departure for learning, d) systematic study of problems of everyday life at school, e) cross-curricular approach to knowledge (Vrettos and Kapsalis, 1997, Papagiannopoulos et al, 2000).

### 2. Benefits of project work in second and foreign language settings

Many benefits of incorporating project work in second and foreign language settings have been suggested. First, the process leading to the end-product of project-work provides opportunities for students to develop their confidence and independence (Fried-Booth, 2002). In addition, students demonstrate increased self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning (Stoller, 2006:27). Students’ autonomy is enhanced (Skehan, 1998), especially when they are actively

engaged in project planning (e.g. choice of topic). A further frequently mentioned benefit relates to students' increased social, cooperative skills, and group cohesiveness (Coleman, 1992; Papagiannopoulos et al, 2000: 36-37).

Another reported benefit is improved language skills (Levine, 2004). Because students engage in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities, they have the opportunity to use language in a relatively natural context (Haines, 1989) and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use. Authentic activities refer to activities designed to develop students' thinking and problem solving skills which are important in out-of-schools contexts, and to foster learning to learn (Brown et al, 1993). While activities are 'Anything students are expected to do, beyond getting input through reading or listening, in order to learn, practice, apply, evaluate, or in any other way respond to curricular content' (Brophy and Alleman, 1991), authentic activities are tasks with real world relevance and utility, "that integrate across the curriculum, that provide appropriate levels of complexity, and that allow students to select appropriate levels of difficulty or involvement" (Jonassen, 1991), as quoted in Herrington et al, 2003). Among other characteristics, authentic activities have real-world relevance, provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, enhance collaboration and reflection, and allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome (Reeves et al, 2002). In addition, project-based learning provides opportunities for "the natural integration of language skills" (Stoller, 2006:33).

A further benefit is that because project work progresses according to the specific context and students' interests (Kriwas, 1999:149), students have enhanced motivation, engagement and enjoyment (Lee, 2002). From a motivational perspective, projects being authentic tasks, are more meaningful to students, increase interest, motivation to participate, and can promote learning (Brophy, 2004). Enjoyment and motivation also stem from the fact that classroom language is not predetermined, but depends on the nature of the project (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:149).

Another set of reported benefits pertains to the development of problem-solving and higher order critical thinking skills (Allen, 2004). These skills are very important, since they are life-long, transferable skills to settings outside the classroom.

Finally, according to Dornyei (2001:100-101), among other potential benefits, project work encourages motivation, fosters group cohesiveness, increases expectancy of success in target language, achieves "a rare synthesis of academic and social goals", reduces anxiety, increases the significance of effort relative to ability, and promotes effort-based attributions.

### **3. Teacher role in project-based learning**

Effective project-based learning requires the teacher to assume a different role (Levy, 1997). The teacher's role is not dominant, but he/she acts as a guide, advisor, coordinator (Papandreou, 1994), and facilitator. In implementing the project method, the focal point of the learning process moves from the teacher to the learners, from working alone to working in groups.

### **4. Stages in project work**

The following general stages can be used for successful project implementation. They constitute a practical guide for the sequencing of project activities for teachers who want to implement projects in their classrooms (Kriwas, 1999).

#### *4.1 Stage 1: Speculation*

This stage includes choice of project topic and sensitisation about it, aiming at arousing interest and developing a climate conducive to speculation and investigation that will lead smoothly to the research process. Topic is chosen after a dialogue among all members of the group, and the teacher. The initial stimulus may emerge from the curriculum, or after a discussion about a contemporary local or wider topic of interest, or from reading a newspaper or magazine article (Brinia, 2006: 79).

#### *4.2 Stage 2: Designing the project activities*

This stage includes formation of groups and assigning of roles, decisions concerning methodology, sources of information, activities that will take place, and places outside the classroom that students will visit. The better organised and more analytical the structuring of the activities, the easier and faster the research will be conducted (Fragoulis, 2008).

#### *4.3 Stage 3: Conducting the project activities*

At this stage the groups implement the activities designed in the previous stage. Students gather information, process and categorize it. If deemed necessary, there may be intervals of information and feedback, in which students discuss issues related with cooperation among group members, problems of personal relations, and possible changes in group composition.

The next phase is synthesis and processing of information gathered. The final products are displayed in the school or the wider community, and become a stimulus for thought and action for other students, teachers and local community. The

project moves away from school and becomes social intervention, connecting the school with the community and real life (Fragoulis, 2008:35).

#### 4.4 Stage 4: Evaluation

Evaluation refers to the assessment of the activities from participants and discussion about whether the initial aims and goals have been achieved, implementation of the process, and final products (Brinia, 2006:82). Evaluation also entails assessment of the experience at individual and group level, identification of errors and problems, but also appraisal of the rich cognitive and experiential material gathered. Evaluation includes evaluation from others, as well as self-evaluation.

Although there are many studies focusing on the theoretical underpinnings for project-based learning in foreign language teaching, there are relatively few empirical studies linking theory with practice, evaluating the impact of project work in the context of foreign language instruction. In this context, our study examines the practical aspects of implementing project work in primary school settings, reporting difficulties encountered, benefits from project work, and pedagogical implications.

### 5. A case study of project work: from theory to practice

#### 5.1 Participants

Fifteen sixth grade primary school students, aged 11-12 years, in a village in the prefecture of Achaia in Greece took part in the project. Two primary school teachers participated, a school teacher, who had experience in the implementation of modern teaching methods, and the teacher of English. The project lasted six months and students worked on it for two hours per week, in the framework of day long school.

#### 5.2 Goals of project work

The overarching aim was to implement project work in order to make students aware of the history of the area in which they live, and use it as a mechanism for cross curricular, and interdisciplinary work, as well as to make use of new technologies. The specific aims were:

##### *Cognitive aims*

- 1) To help students learn about the history of their village and the wider area.
- 2) To help students realize the significance of the historical and natural environment in relation to the sustainable development of the area.
- 3) To improve students' reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary skills, and communicative competence.
- 4) *Emotional aims*
- 5) To sensitize students about the problems connected with the development of the area.
- 6) To foster respect about the collaborative efforts of people who lived in the specific geographical area.
- 7) *Psychomotor aims:*
- 8) To acquaint students with observation and research.
- 9) To foster the development of curiosity and observation skills to students.

#### 5.3 Sequence of project activities

Drawing on Stoller (2002), the following six stages were followed. The first step included choosing the topic of the project and agreeing on the final outcomes. The project topic was "local history", and it was determined by both the teacher and the students, since it was a semi-structured project (Henry, 1994). The term "local history" refers to the total social, cultural, financial and political history of a specific region in relation to the history of the wider geographical region of which it is part, but also in relation to the national and global history (Papagiannopoulos et al, 2007:17).

Choice of topic for research was based on the following criteria: a) the topic forms part of the immediate students' experiences, b) it is close to their interests, needs and their everyday problems, c) it creates the conditions necessary for investigating, interpreting and critically analysing the world. Students study local history, come into contact with the problems of the area and approach them diachronically, make judgements, analyse and compare information, so they gradually acquire historical awareness.

In the second stage teachers and students structured the project work. This included determining information required, sources of information, how analysis of information will take place, formation of project groups on the basis of the students' interests and needs, and assigning roles and coordinators for each group. The following principles were applied in relation to group formation and function (Brophy, 2008:161): a) tasks were at such level of difficulty that students could complete with reasonable effort, b) each group member was allocated some specific responsibilities, c)

each group had a goal and motivation to work toward the goal, and d) the teacher checked the progress of groups at regular intervals, providing progress and corrective feedback.

The third stage included the gathering of information from a variety of sources. The process and study of issues related with local history was attempted through the cross curricular - interdisciplinary approach. The following activities were implemented:

- Search in a variety of information sources (magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and libraries).
- Field trip to Patras to interview individuals who are engaged, either directly or indirectly with the operation of the port of Patras.
- Collection of articles, fictional texts, myths and legends about the area.

The fourth stage included analysis of data gathered, that is, selection of appropriate information and discarding of irrelevant material. The fifth stage was presentation of the final products, which included:

- Creation of a topographic map.
- Creation of an album with photographs and comments depicting the “positive” and “negative” human interventions in the area.
- Creation of a brochure about the importance of protecting the area and its ecosystem.
- PowerPoint presentation.
- Organization of an event directed towards the local community, presenting the final products from project work.

The final stage included evaluation of the project. Evaluation was expressed positively and not negatively, because the aim was to reflect on language and content mastered, effectiveness of steps and activities used (Stoller, 2002; Fragoulis, 2008:54). The focus is on whether and to what extent knowledge, experiences, and skills acquired formed new values and attitudes that changed or substituted old negative attitudes. These transformations constitute the essence of real learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the above activities implemented in the context of project work do not constitute “ideal” or “correct” classroom practices. English teachers should be aware that what is successful in one teaching situation might be inappropriate in another. We simply wish the project presented here to become a starting point for teachers to reflect in relation to their students’ needs and interests, and motivate them to incorporate new interactive teaching methods in order to make teaching more attractive and keep up with the social reality (Fragoulis and Mega, 2009).

## **6. Benefits from project work**

Most cognitive, emotional and psychomotor aims (see section 5.2) of project work were achieved by the majority of students. More specifically, in relation to language skills, most learners’ willingness to participate in learning activities increased. They were more eager to experiment with new language, since they were less concerned with “sounding silly” (Lightbown and Spada, 1999:31). At the end of the school term, most students showed an improvement in all four language skills. Their speaking and listening skills, in particular, had the greatest improvement. This was particularly important, since it is not uncommon for students to have good knowledge of the linguistic system of the target language, but little listening comprehension and speaking skills, because they are not provided with opportunities to participate in real and authentic communication activities.

As far as motivation is concerned, findings seem to support the view expressed in many studies that project work results in enjoyment and sense of self-esteem (Levine, 2004). For some students with low performance, however, increased self-esteem seemed to last only for the duration of the project. It seems, therefore, that project work alone cannot adequately address issues of self-esteem. Most importantly, however, most students seemed to have developed intrinsic motivation, participating in learning activities for “the spontaneous feelings of interest and enjoyment” (Deci and Moller, 2005:582). As what a low performing student said: “I really liked it (the project) I wish we did it more often”.

In addition, students gathered a wealth of information about local history from a variety of sources (books, interviews, and the internet), learned a lot about local history, and gained in-depth understanding of issues related to local history. These findings are similar to findings suggesting the development of content knowledge through project work (Gu, 2004).

Most students’ communicative competence developed, mainly discourse competence, that is, the ability to connect sentences to form a meaningful whole, and strategic competence, “the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence” (Canale and Swain, 1980). Their grammatical competence “knowledge of lexical items and of

rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology” (ibid), and sociocultural competence (using language in a social context) showed less improvement, though.

Their social skills and collaborative skills improved dramatically, which is consistent with findings in other studies (Coleman, 1992). After the project work students knew that being a team member entailed certain obligations, most of them developed skills for solving in-group conflicts, and learned to be responsible in relation to the roles assigned to them. Most importantly, all students, regardless of language performance, or motivational intensity seemed to have developed their cooperative skills. Also, their computer skills improved, mainly, the ability to use the internet to search for information.

### 7. Difficulties encountered

The most serious problem related to the fact that students were not familiar with group work. At the beginning, although clear roles for group members were assigned, some students dominated the work, while others did little work. Also, some students did not use the target language for communication, but their mother tongue. The teachers remedied these problems by providing cognitive modeling, completing a task while thinking aloud, modeling and illustrating effective strategies and procedures for task completion.

Another difficulty concerned the fact that some students felt that the duration of the project was too long. Some students seemed to have lost interest and motivation by the end of the project. It seems that short-term projects may have more validity for primary school learners than long-term ones.

Finally, some students had difficulty accepting the new role of the teacher as a facilitator and coordinator, and not as a source of knowledge and provider of solutions. At the beginning of project work some students felt uncomfortable with being given choices (e.g. topic selection, team formation), and were thus apprehensive about project work. However, most of them soon realized that the teacher was there to support and assist them, albeit in a different way.

### 8. Discussion and conclusion

It is important to acknowledge a limitation of this study. Due to the small number of participants, and the fact that we present findings from just one case study, care should be taken in generalizing the research findings.

The activities presented in the article are a different way of teaching local history and English as a foreign language, adopting the pedagogical principle of exploratory learning. Students acquire knowledge through a process of “building” it, form groups, cooperate, use authentic, “real” information sources, process and evaluate them, take initiatives, and make decisions. They develop autonomy because they have choices and develop a sense of control and responsibility for their learning, approaching learning in a way that suits their “abilities, styles and preferences” (Skehan, 1998: 273).

The teachers who implemented the project stated that their experience gained was extremely important. Despite problems of school infrastructure and resources available, and lack of experience in project work, their initial fears and insecurity were finally overcome. They evaluated positively the potential offered by the project method and expressed the need for their systematic training in the method.

An implication for further research is to examine the relation between short-term project work and students’ communicative competence, and the effect of projects on the self-esteem of students with low performance.

The pedagogical implications are clear. Education is not offered with impersonal teaching methods and educational tools. The teacher is indispensable source of inspiration and encouragement, a “living example” to students. In addition, knowledge of modern teaching methods, and willingness to experiment with non-traditional teaching practices are powerful tools for the achievement of teaching aims, such as increased motivation, interest, and performance in the hands of teachers in the context of English as a foreign language instruction.

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## A Study on CPH and Debate Summary in FLL

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### Abstract

The optimal age in FLL (foreign language learning) for children has been discussing over 50 years but there is no satisfactory conclusion for us. However, the notion “the younger, the better” in FLL has a big market in the world. As a result, the distorted hypothesis is being spreading widely as a true and complete theory. Specifically speaking, it’s caused by the confusion on the concepts of “second language and foreign language”, “learning and acquisition”, “CPH (critical period hypothesis)”. Therefore, based upon the discussion of theoretical foundation of linguistics, psychology and physiology in FLL for children, the environment of FLL and the importance of mother tongue, all of us will have a complete knowledge of the concept. By analyzing the deep reasons on the tendency of lowering the age in FLL both at home and abroad, those blind followers who are still being misled will have a rational attitude towards FLL. Hence, the rational deeds of “a language can be taught from any age upwards” will definitely go into the heart of everyone.

**Keywords:** Optimal age, Second language & foreign language, Learning & acquisition, CPH

### 1. Introduction

The starting age of foreign language learning for children has been discussing over 50 years worldwide. It had also been discussed twice both in the 80s and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in China. However, there is no satisfactory conclusion for us. English course began to be offered gradually in elementary schools in China from the fall of 2001, while the notion “the younger, the better” in learning a foreign language is believed without any doubt by many people. In view of this situation, based upon the analyses on the theoretical foundation of linguistics, psychology and physiology in FLL for children, the environment of FLL as well as the importance of mother tongue, we put forward only a few comments and suggestions on the tendency of lowering the age in FLL in China presently. By doing so, we are expecting to get some substantial conclusions from the analyses, which can be of some benefit to FLL for children, so as to face the realistic problem of “FLES (Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools)” with a rational attitude.

### 2. Clear-up of the key terms

#### 2.1 Acquisition vs learning

Krashen uses the term ‘acquisition’ to refer to the spontaneous and incidental process of rule internalization that result from natural language use, where the learner’s attention is focused on meaning rather than form. It contrasts with ‘learning’ (Ellis, 1999, p.692).

Krashen uses the term ‘learning’ to refer to the development of conscious knowledge of an L2 through formal study. It means the same as *explicit knowledge* (ibid). In this process, the learner’s attention is focused on form rather than meaning.

The language gained through learning can neither be changed into the knowledge of language acquisition system nor express the speaker’s meaning in the natural situation of communication, but only elaborate the function of ‘monitoring’. ‘Monitoring’ is the learner’s conscious supervision over the quality of his own language output, which occurs before, after or during the process.

Language learning refers to the mastering of the language through language teaching, while language acquisition is the grasping of the language by natural, random and quantity times of contacting with the language (Wilkinson, 1990, p.38).

#### 2.2 Second language vs foreign language

In a broad sense, second language refers to a language beyond mother tongue or first language (Ellis, 1999, p.692). This definition emphasizes the general character of all languages except mother tongue. However, foreign language is

different from second language in the essence.

Stern (1999, p.366) discusses the differences between foreign language and second language from the aspect of their language function, learning aims, language environment, learning methods and the like. 'Second language' is opposite to 'first language', while 'foreign language' and 'non-native language' are opposite to 'mother tongue' and 'native language'. 'First language', 'mother tongue' and 'native language' are of one group, while 'second language', 'foreign language' and 'non-native language' of the other.

Second language often has the official status and established social function in its local place, while foreign language does not. The aim of learning a second language is to take part in all-round political and economic activities in the country the language belongs to, while the aim of learning a foreign language is for traveling, communicating with native speakers, reading foreign literature and scientific documents. In learning a second language there is a sufficient language environment, while there are few chances and places of contacting with the foreign language except the limited classroom teaching and several copies of textbooks. Foreign language teaching is often in the classroom, while second language learning doesn't need any formal classroom teaching but usually acquired in natural environment.

In my understanding, TESL (teaching English as a second language) is the kind of teaching to teach and learn a language with the language environment itself, but not the learners' native language. For example, when we Chinese go to the USA or Britain to study or work there, we have to learn English so as to live and communicate with the local people. Such kind of teaching should be called TESL. Another important sign is whether it is TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) or TESL depends on the teaching language of other subjects used in the school. If their teaching language is their mother tongue or they teach the subjects chiefly in their mother tongue, then the English teaching should be called TEFL. Obviously, English teaching in China is TEFL.

Instead of being acquired, English can only be learnt in China, therefore it's very difficult.

### 3. Literature review of FLES

#### 3.1 A General introduction to the study of age in FLL abroad

It seems that it's a common sense for everyone that children have dominant superiority in FLL. But what are the theoretical basis and the experimental foundation for the cognition? Concerning the issue of age in FLL, many fields of science like psycholinguistics, neuro-linguistics, cognitive linguistics, socio-psychology, pedagogy, linguistics, the science of human brains and others have to be dealt with, therefore, it is a real complex problem. From the relative researches and experiments, we can see clearly that most of the researchers admit that there is a critical period in acquisition or learning of an L2 instead of a foreign language, but disputes still remain on the recognition of this issue.

Actually, age doesn't make up the dominant superiority in foreign language learning until it is combined with the other factors, only by doing so can it produce effect and elaborate its superiority. The important factors among the factors mentioned here are the guarantee of the quality of teaching, enough learning time and the setting-up of the language environment. In other words, FLL in the earlier age for children cannot guarantee their language superiority except that there are painstakingly designed courses, higher quality teachers and favorable environment for FLL.

We are facing different kinds of difficulties and problems of the research on the issue of age and FLL as there are so many factors affecting the results of it. As a result, there has been no agreement on the research of optimal age in FLL so far. (Nikolov M, 2000, p.21-48) In a word, the process of cognition has been experienced repeatedly in the following stages.

#### 3.2 Previous research into FLES abroad (Huanqi Zuo, 2002, p.36-40)

##### 3.2.1 First stage

From 1940s to 1960s, there's a strong view both in theory and practice that the starting age of foreign language learners should be shifted to a younger one. Neuro-physiologists like W. Penfield and L. Robert emphasized that the starting age of foreign language learners should be from 4 to 10 years old in ordinary schools according to the demands of brain psychology. E. Lenneberg put forward the famous "critical period hypothesis" in 1967 that natural language learning only took place between the ages of 2 and 13 or so (before puberty). Based on these theories, the upsurge of FLES occurred in the USA. Foreign languages were taught from grade 3, 4 or 5 in most elementary schools and even in some kindergartens there, too. For a time, FLES had become a special term and subject in the circles of linguistics and education. At the same time, the experiment of shifting to a younger age in foreign language teaching began in Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and so on.

##### 3.2.2 Second stage

After a period of practice and experiment, the upsurge of FLES has begun to fall back to its original state since 1970s. The most important reason was they were short of qualified teachers, good textbooks. Therefore, teaching quality was far from expected. As early as in 1963, the British Educational Department organized a ten-year experiment (1964-1974)

in Scotland and Walsh. The results were: Those didn't take part in the experiment but began to learn French at the age of 11 had better results than those did it at the age of 8, when graduating from secondary schools. Thereafter, quite a few experiment reports, like the ones from the USA, Denmark and so on indicated the students began to learn foreign languages in secondary schools and those had done them for 11 years from elementary schools both reached the same level. In theory research, the "critical period hypothesis" raised by E. Lenneberg was doubted at the same time. The main basis of the "critical period hypothesis" was that one couldn't learn a foreign language well after the brain lateralization before one's puberty. But the experiments by Krashen and some other experts proved the brain lateralization possibly completed before 4 years old. As a matter of fact, foreign languages could still be learnt well after 4 years old. T. Scovel thought different people had different brain lateralization, for there's no same "critical period". Thereafter, linguists and child language researchers all considered that age wasn't as important as people imagined, for there were many factors affecting FLL. In the mid-1990s, the percentage of schools of FLES was only 26% among the total in the USA.

A. Fathman and Krashen's viewpoints reflected mainly the opinions of the researchers' on the problem of age in FLL during that period. In 1975, A. Fathman made an investigation on the mastering of English of the immigrants' children (about 200) in Washington D.C. These children had been in the USA for less than 3 years and they didn't speak English at home. The result of the investigation indicated that older children (11-15y) did better than younger ones (6-10y) on words and sentences, but the latter did better on pronunciation. After the summary of the others' research results, Krashen pointed out that, comparing adults with children, older children with younger ones, the former of the two groups both developed faster in learning words and sentences, however, in a natural language environment, children had a higher level than adults in mastering an L2 in the end. (Krashen, 1982, pp.120-129.)

### 3.2.3 Third stage

Since 1990s, some new phenomena have been found in the research of bilingual education, that is, some less than 7-year-old children had an active attitude toward an L2 and its culture after having received the bilingual education. These attitudes both pushed them forward in learning an L2 and made them get better results. Meanwhile, when the children began to learn an L2 before 7 years old, they could have natural pronunciation and intonation as the English native speakers' when they became adults. When they began to learn English after 14 years old, they often had their L1 accents. When they began to learn English from the ages of 7, 14 or 15, their English was quite different from one another. This phenomenon indicated that, just as the research results made by A. Fathman and Krashen, those began to learn an L2 from a younger age in their childhood could at least have better pronunciation and intonation than those didn't. These phenomena changed the viewpoints on the starting age in teaching an L2 in some countries. Taking Holland for example, it decided to teach English in elementary schools again and have already financed much in training English teachers.

Stern drew a conclusion (Stern, 1999) that "a guiding principle arrived at after a review of much of the available evidence (Stern & Weinrib, 1977, p.20, 1978, p.167) has been 'to recognize that a language can be taught from any age upwards. Once this has been accepted, the decision at what stage in the educational process to introduce a foreign language can be governed by three criteria: (a) the estimated time necessary to reach a desired level of language proficiency by a specified stage in the school career of the majority of learners; (b) the educational value attributed to learning foreign languages at a given stage of the curriculum; and (c) the human and material resources required to develop and maintain an educationally sound and successful foreign language program.'"

In a word, the repetitive cognition on the starting age in learning an L2 gave us proof that it's really a complicated problem. When to begin foreign language teaching in elementary schools should be decided step by step according to the experiments by researchers for a long time. To begin FLES too early and without qualified teachers or good textbooks, it couldn't make a better foundation for the pupils in learning an L2. What's worse, it would affect their level of L1 in their future adult life and this kind of loss would be irreparable.

## 3.3 Previous research into FLES in China

### 3.3.1 A brief history of FLES since the early 1960s

#### 3.3.1.1 First stage

Early in the 1960s, the streamline of foreign language teaching from elementary school to university was advocated greatly, but it only started in a few affiliated schools to some foreign languages institutes, and there were about 14 such schools set up in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai and so on. Most of the pupils were selected from grade 3 in many elementary schools in big cities according to their scores of maths and Chinese. (Ke Fu, 1987, p.66)

#### 3.3.1.2 Second stage

In 1976, everything was taking on a new look in China and FLES began nationwide. Unfortunately, it was abandoned in the early 1980s hurriedly. The main cause was due to the lack of qualified foreign language teachers, suitable textbooks,

educational research, and the problem of teaching connection between elementary and secondary schools. However, people in the cities of Shanghai, Beijing and so on, kept on teaching English in elementary schools for they had better teaching conditions. (Daoyi Liu. 2001, Issue 8)

### 3.3.1.3 Third stage

Since the late 1980s, due to the policy of reform and opening-up-to-the-outside-world, FLES began to be advocated again nationwide, therefore causing debates at the same time among scholars and researchers. Finally, the decision of offering English courses, from grade 3 in elementary school in the fall of 2001, was made by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Though it kept up with the trends of FLES in the world, yet brought greater debates on the issue. This time many famous scholars and researchers took part in it by writing papers and articles in magazines and newspapers, thus, forming 3 kinds of viewpoints.

### 3.3.2 Three kinds of viewpoints on FLES in China

#### 3.3.2.1 First kind

Many experts and researchers hold the viewpoints that it's not necessary to offer foreign language courses to children nationwide without enough qualified teachers, suitable textbooks or other teaching equipment. They disagree to the idea "the younger, the better" in FLL.

Guozhang Xu once said in a magazine. "A piece of news was reported on the front page in Guang Ming Daily that there's an experiment of education in Shanghai. The main meaning is that a private school is opening up there, and it will enroll new students by its own without any national examinations. The pupils in this school are beginning to learn a foreign language from elementary school, and will go on to learn another one when they are in junior middle school. Concerning the pros and cons of the national examinations, we shouldn't make any casual remarks about them. But talking about FLES, I have got a good lesson. English course covered most of the time during my 5 years' study in elementary school. We had learnt altogether about 160 articles in the 5 years, one each week on average. And the texts had been rewritten over and over again. As a result, they became the articles of only sentences without literary grace, only texts without feelings. We did recite each one of them, but we still couldn't get the real or lively English. Besides, pupils were made to pay special attention to English, as a result, our mother tongue---Chinese was reduced and affected much as a whole. Now pupils and students have to learn English for 11 years from elementary to secondary schools in some attached schools of universities, dealing with short articles is the main activity in their learning, which is very drab and dull. From this you can see how the pupils' appetites spoiled in the attached schools. I don't know what the reformers think about the above. But I wish that the reformers should have their eyes on the basis of our own language and culture before all the others, and still I'd like to suggest that English, Chinese and mathematics should be paid attention to on average."

Concerning the problem of FLES, Shichun Gui (1987, pp.56-57) had some doubts on it in one of his articles. It said that the result of the present modes of English teaching both in elementary and secondary schools were not satisfactory. Students had spent 6 years in learning English (about 900 hours) in secondary schools, as a result, they could only know a little bit of grammar and remember about 1,800 words, let alone their bad language ability. From the perspective of educational economy, the loss outweighed the gain. This was due to the traditional idea that FLL should be started from a younger age, as for the time, the longer the better. However, the problem of the other side of it had been neglected. This kind of situation was especially serious in China.

Gui presented his ideas in one of the Foreign Language Teaching Seminars in 2003 that "Days ago Professor McWhinney, a psychologist, of the University Carnegie-Mellon came to Guangzhou to give a lecture, he asked me 'why do the schools both in Taiwan and the mainland go in for offering English course in elementary schools?' It's very hard for me to give him a satisfactory answer. To offer English course in elementary schools is a policy made by the Chinese Ministry of Education, but I don't know how this policy was made. At the beginning, English course was offered from grade 5 in elementary schools, later from grade 3 and now grade 1. In Guangdong province, many elementary schools began to offer it from grade 1, some even did it from kindergartens, what's worse, some even from the babies in their mothers' wombs just because it's said that they should learn English before they were born. In a word, it's just because of the so-called common sense that 'the earlier, the better' in learning a foreign language. Actually, two international conferences were held on FLES in Hamburg Germany after World War II in 1962 and 1966 sponsored by the UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), specially discussing the issue of whether or not to offer a foreign language course in elementary schools. Finally, a conclusion was drawn by Carol, a psychologist from the USA, saying that 'there is no satisfactory answer to it' on the issue of whether children do better and faster than adults in learning a foreign language. Besides, there are some other conclusions. 1) Does it have any effects on other subjects? According to those attendants, there are some effects, but not very much. 2) Pronunciation level of those earlier foreign language learners would be trained near that of the native speakers'. These two points seem to support the notion of FLES, but there are some opposite viewpoints at the same time. First, FLES is really good to

the pronunciation. However, other abilities such as vocabulary, grammar and the like would grow with the growth of age even up to one's twenties except pronunciation, which has something to do with the development of cognition. Second, although pronunciation really benefits from FLES, yet curriculum of not even one country required the pupils to raise their pronunciation level near that of the native speakers' at that time. Third, to reach this level, teachers must be the native speakers. If not, how could they train their pupils' pronunciation level near that of the native speakers'. From the condition of that time in the world, it's impossible for all the elementary schools to employ the teachers from English-speaking countries. Till the end of the two conferences, FLES in all countries was still in the experimental stage. Not even one country said that it would spread it nationwide. I think this is a wrong way in FLL. Experiments could be done, but we shouldn't call all the schools to do it without considering their real conditions. Once I talked with the makers of the curriculum. I asked them: 'Have you ever done any survey in the backward areas in the mountains?' In those areas, the secondary schools are short of English teachers, let alone the elementary schools. They said 'yes'. 'Then, why did you put forward the idea of FLES in the curriculum?' I asked. They said that the curriculum should be elastic and advanced. To carry it out or not is another matter. But first we must put it forward. It doesn't matter whether the school couldn't do it or not. This is another wrong way in making the curriculum. Since the curriculum is elastic, and to carry it out or not is of no importance, then, what's the use of making such a curriculum?"

Besides, who would teach the pupils when starting learning foreign languages in elementary schools nationwide? Where could we find so many qualified teachers?

As far as the shortage of qualified teachers is concerned, Zhengdong Zhang said that "there are 500 thousand secondary school teachers of English now, but we need 3 times as many as those of elementary school English teachers, that is, 1.5 million, at least 1 million must go to the posts". (Zhengdong Zhang, 2001.3.1) "It's known that the time of training a qualified teacher will spend 3 years at least." (Daoyi Liu. 2001, Issue 8) Where can we find so many qualified teachers in such a short time? If we let the unqualified teachers go to the posts, the result will be from bad to worse. If we go on doing it this way, more and more losses will be cost both in human forces and material resources.

Taking the English words for example, 3000-4000 words must be mastered during the basic education period, that is, for the students from grade 1 to grade 12 according to *the New Standards of English Course for Basic Education* made by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2001. Thus, 600-700 words must be mastered during the years from grade 3 to grade 6 in elementary school. This number of words is the same amount as that for junior 1 to 3 in the 1980s. A nationwide survey of the graduates from junior middle schools made by the Association of TEFL in Northwest and Southwest of China in 1997 showed that each student spent 9 hours a week on English course both in and out of class, that is, 540 minutes per week. (Zhengdong Zhang, 2001.3.1) Now there are long and short classes in elementary schools, and there are altogether 4 classes per week. It's estimated that there are 120 minutes in school, even if we add another 120 minutes after school, there are altogether 240 minutes. Comparing with junior middle school students, how could the elementary pupils learn English well in such a short time?

The State Education Commission organized a nationwide survey on English teaching, 15 provinces and cities involved, including 57,080 senior and junior grade 3 students from 139 middle schools in 1985. The results showed that among the students who had learned English in primary schools, some results are very good, such as the cities of Shanghai and Guangdong, ranking the first and the third respectively. But some results are not ideal, such as the cities of Beijing and Tianjin, which are significantly lower than those of the students who began to learn English from junior grade 1 in middle school from Jilin, Anhui and Hubei provinces.

In 2003, the research on age and FLL was done in Dingfang Su's research project of "English Language Teaching Theory and Practice" sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education. It's a survey on the successful experience of the renowned foreign language scholars and the learning results of the students studying German. The results showed that the starting age in FLL isn't "the younger, the better". People, from 20 to 30 years old, can achieve the same good results as those who start FLL from an earlier age. Stern's view that a language can be taught from any age upwards was proved right again. Learning successfully or not depends much on the quality of teachers, the learning environment and personal effort.

### 3.3.2.2 Second kind

Among the scholars, who are in favor of the decision, Lin Chen is the chief representative. It is clear that the ideas of this kind are based mainly on the conditions that there are qualified teachers of English, suitable textbooks and good teaching equipments. In other words, it can be done only in the schools with good teaching conditions, while in the backward areas it is very hard to carry it out.

Chen Lin presented his ideas in one article that in order to improve the foreign language level nationally, something must be done from the stage of basic education.

In answering the question of "Will the elementary pupils be loaded with much more after offering English course since they have already been loaded with much?" Chen's reply is: "Both 'yes' and 'no'. But it all depends on man. This 'man'

is teacher. So we should say that ‘It all depends on teacher.’”

In a word, as long as the contents and methods of English teaching can arouse children’s interest, it will open the door of a new world for them, thus, making them not only stand outside of the gate peeping inside curiously but also go inside to have a thorough look. Let us give the key to the door to children as soon as possible.

### 3.3.2.3 Third kind

Some scholars keep an attitude of eclecticism, whose viewpoints are solving the problems in the process of teaching and Zhuanglin Hu is the main advocator. He said many university students in the past years still had some difficulties in learning a foreign language, though having spent much time on it. As a result, time was overused on foreign language learning, and to some extent, their major studies were affected at the same time. Now the students’ foreign language level has been improved steadily on average, which is due to the emphases both from basic and family education. At present, elementary schools nationwide are actively preparing to offer foreign language courses and this should be approved. But much attention should be paid to choosing textbooks by experts’ assessment. Concerning the inadequacy of foreign language teachers, He suggested no matter what kind of difficulties lying in front of us, we should offer the courses firstly in the places with well-equipped conditions, while the backward areas should do their best to catch up with the former gradually. All the problems can be solved and the teaching level will be improved little by little. All the weaknesses can be counteracted and the inadequacy will be made up for step by step through teachers training, which should be strengthened.

## 4. Related Theories on FLES

### 4.1 Critical period hypothesis

It states that there is a period (i.e. up to a certain age) during which learners can acquire an L2 easily and achieve native-speaker competence, but after this period L2 acquisition becomes more difficult and is rarely entirely successful. Researchers differ over when this critical period comes to an end (Ellis, 1999, p.712). In other words, there is a widely held lay belief that younger L2 learners generally do better than older learners. This is supported by the *critical period hypothesis*, according to which there is a fixed span of years during which language learning can take place naturally and effortlessly, and after which it is not possible to be completely successful. Penfield and Roberts in 1959, for example, argued that the optimum period for language acquisition falls within the first ten years of life, when the brain retains its plasticity. Initially, this period was equated with the period taken for lateralization of the language function to the left side of the brain to be completed. Work on children and adults who had experienced brain injuries or operations indicated that damage to the left hemisphere caused few speech disorders or loss of linguistic capabilities and was rapidly repaired in the case of children before puberty (about 12 year-old) but not adults (Lenneberg, 1967, p.66).

Children can communicate with others during their first few years since coming to this world and these years are “the critical period” of their language development. This is taken as the universal truth. In fact, it’s mistaken or at least misunderstood. The reason is that infancy has been mistaken as the critical period of language development without explaining clearly that it’s *the case for one’s mother tongue, not for the other languages*. The reason children can communicate with others during their first few years since coming to this world is that they speak in their mother tongue, and it’s the language they use in their daily life not the other languages beyond their life.

Strictly speaking, mother tongue can’t be taught or learnt, but acquired or developed in the environment of their native speakers.

This idea had already been raised by some famous educators. Taking the Italian educator Maria Montessori for example, she thought that child language can’t be taught but developed and its development is just like the natural creation. Meanwhile, it follows the innate rules (LAD, i.e., Language Acquisition Device) suitable for all children. The language she mentioned here is the natural language in children’s daily life, that is, their mother tongue. Chomsky (1995, p.186), stated the same point of view, but it’s much more systematic with the background of linguistic philosophy and linguistic psychology. He thought that language couldn’t be taught or learnt, either. Living in an unorganized language environment without any training, or any special language direction, children could still develop their language themselves. He once said that the expression “learning language” could be easily misunderstood. It would be more suitable to use “grammar growing” instead of “learning language”. He considered language a kind of “body organ” just like the other organs. So language also has a growing and developing process, which is quite natural and believable. As long as the language environment is natural, any child can develop its language naturally. What we need to point out here is that the language Chomsky referred to is one’s mother tongue.

Now we can see that both Chomsky and Montessori considered that language could be developed naturally in the environment and culture of one’s mother tongue, which has already been accepted by people without any further proof.

### 4.2 Non-critical period hypothesis

In 1978, C. Snow and her colleagues did a thorough research on the critical period hypothesis. In her article *Age*

*Differences in Second Language Acquisition*, C. Snow gave her all-round commentary about the research. The researchers took the Dutch language learners of different ages whose mother tongue is English as the experimental subjects, and did longitudinal research on their language acquisition activities in the natural environment. Finally, they found that the research subjects between the ages of 12 and 15 and those of adults grasped the Dutch language quickest at the beginning months of the acquisition. But after one-year-study, the research subjects between the ages of 8 and 10, 12 and 15 mastered the Dutch language best while the children between the ages of 3 and 5 did worst in all the tests. This result of their research denied the critical period hypothesis.

The experiment of age affecting FLL is being done everywhere from time to time in the world. Whether it is the critical period hypothesis or the non-critical period hypothesis, we know what they are experimenting on is not language learning but language acquisition from the perspective of foreign language definition. What they are experimenting on is not FLL but second language acquisition. For this reason, whether there is critical period or not in foreign language learning, all of the research is still unbelievable to us, that is to say, we still can't be convinced by all of their research and experiment now. In other words, no final conclusion has been reached on this matter in the whole world of linguistics and therefore it's still an open hypothesis. But there is one agreement to us all: Early starters can gain better pronunciation and intonation and some of them can even get closer to that of the native speakers'. However, when children surpass their puberty, it's very hard or impossible for them to do so. But what we should notice is that there are some certain conditions for children to elaborate the superiority of their powerful imitation ability. In other words, if children want to develop their pronunciation and communication skills better, they must have better teachers on these aspects. (Xiaodong Liu, 2002, p.31-40) "Otherwise, children could only imitate and get the non-standard pronunciation or nondescript expressions in spoken language (Shichun Gui, 1992, p.54)".

In China, English is the main language in foreign language teaching. It's known that it's difficult for us to learn English well for it doesn't exist naturally in our daily life as our mother tongue does. Our culture isn't encoded by it. Thus, it can't be used as the tool of communication or thinking. It can't be developed the way our mother tongue---Chinese does, growing day by day. So English has to be learnt, not acquired in China. Mother tongue is developed naturally with the natural language background, so it does have a critical period of development. But, English learning is a kind of man-made process of learning for us, and it has no natural developing process. Therefore, it has no critical period of development, either.

What we should notice is that it's improper to connect the critical period with FLL. There's little bilingual environment in China, so foreign languages can't be developed naturally here.

#### *4.3 Piaget's theory on child language learning*

The psychologist, Piaget, divided the development of children's cognitive ability into 4 stages in 1971: 1) the stage of mental perception (0-2 years old); 2) the stage of pre-operation (2-7 years old); 3) the stage of concrete operation (7-11 years old); 4) the stage of formal operation (above 11 years old). In his opinion, children of the second stage (2-7 years old) tend to use only one language. If they learn a second language during this period of time, they will not only get certain setbacks to some extent, but also express their thoughts in the two mixed languages, which have no good to the development of children. (Dan Li. 1987, pp.119-159)

At present, children at the second stage, belonging to an inferior state in FLL, go to elementary school at the age of 6 or 7 in China. Pupils begin to learn Chinese pinyin from the beginning of grade 1 in elementary school, which means they will learn the 56 phonetic symbols and their combination. It'll cause pupils' confusion between English letters (26), English phonetic symbols (48) and Chinese pinyin (56), altogether 130 similar letters in the beginning years of elementary schools. In such a case, if they are made to learn English, it's really hard for them to undertake the difficult job beyond their ability.

#### *4.4 Importance of mother tongue*

Sizhong Zhang (Xiongli Yang, 2001.11.21)) expressed his ideas that disadvantages outweigh advantages in bilingual language teaching for children. He added only if you have mastered mother tongue well could you really master a second language completely. During his 30 years of foreign language teaching, Zhang found students who are able to master one or several languages proficiently must have already had a solid basis of mother tongue. The reason is during the students' learning of their mother tongue they've already formed a solid basis of thinking and logic ability as well as a powerful understanding of it. Besides, the better level of one's mother tongue and its composition ability can help a lot in FLL. On the contrary, during the childhood, how can children learn a second language well without the language environment before they have mastered their mother tongue? Learning by rote is bound to bring about the psychological factor of inverse reaction for children.

Many scholars have made similar remarks as Sizhong Zhang's. Naiqiang Yao (1996, p.155) recalled that Guozhang Xu once said some Chinese students' oral English is very fluent, their pronunciation and intonation are also quite standard. They can speak endlessly in English and feel pleased with themselves, but their Chinese is poor and they pay little



attention to the improvement of their culture accomplishment. Frankly speaking, these people are half foreigners at most. He told me repeatedly that being a good English teacher you must have a rich command of cultural accomplishment, especially having a solid foundation of Chinese culture. Only if you have a solid foundation of Chinese and a rich command of knowledge in culture as well as the ability of independent thinking can you enjoy the strong staying power in learning linguistics, literature and the like. Thus, you can be a real scholar in your field.

Mingyuan Gu's speech (2003, pp.18-19) includes the following: Elementary pupils must learn mother tongue well first. You can't develop thinking or intelligence without mastering your mother tongue first; your cultural quality will be affected and can't master your national relics in culture if you haven't learnt mother tongue well; you can't communicate smoothly between nationalities in your nation let alone the communication with other peoples in the world.

As is known, most well-known Chinese foreign-language-experts are great masters of their mother tongue, like Xun Lu, Zhongshu Qian are just a few. They are bilingual experts whose mother tongue---Chinese, is far superior to their second language, furthermore, they are famous for their Chinese works both at home and abroad. Therefore, we must realize clearly mother tongue is one of the cultural kernels and spirits of a nation in learning a second language. We must first and foremost teach children our mother tongue well. Otherwise, we'll take the branch for the root or without differentiating what is elementary from secondary.

#### 4.5 FLES in China and its language environment

Many people think child's age in FLL is: "the younger, the better". In my understanding, there must be some special language environment. You know it's quite different for Chinese children and American minorities' to learn English. For example, if a Chinese couple moves to the USA, their children will have to learn English in school as the Americans do. These Chinese children have to face the natural language environment and culture of English and have enough chances to communicate and play with the people around them. Although English isn't their mother tongue, yet the Chinese children have to face everything encoded by it. Thus, they can think, speak and develop naturally in English. The natural language environment of English would assure them to master English naturally. But in China, the children can't have such an environment of English, and there's no natural communication in English for them. Therefore, the only way for them is to listen to more, to speak more, to practise more, to recite new words, language structures and grammar rules in English learning. This means that children's English learning in China is not natural or real English, but the transition of understanding Chinese and knowing English. And it's just a mixture of comparison from the two languages.

Obviously, it's natural for Chinese children to learn English as an L2 well in the USA, and "the younger, the better". But in China English is a foreign language for them, so it's a different matter totally, and "the younger in age, the more difficult in learning".

### 5. Conclusion

1) Concerning the problem of starting age in FLL, there's been no agreement in the past 50 years. Therefore, we should make people know the difficult situation of FLES worldwide and do what we could to get rid of the misunderstanding of idea "the younger, the better" in TEFL.

2) From the brief history of FLES in China, we are now repeating the same lesson taught in 1980s, especially in the backward areas, because of the same reason that lacks in qualified English teachers and the like. There are three kinds of viewpoints on FLES in China, but all of them agree on the one that qualified English teachers, suitable textbooks and adequate teaching equipment are the prerequisites in carrying out the decision of FLES. And this is what we need most now.

3) It is evident there's no "critical period" in TEFL for children anywhere in China. "Critical period hypothesis" only exists in natural language (mother tongue and L1) acquisition just as Lenneberg raised it in 1967.

However it doesn't mean children couldn't learn foreign languages. What we should do is to create a suitable bilingual environment, compile good textbooks, and use proper teaching methods according to children's psychology and physiology. Among all the factors, to train qualified foreign language teachers is the most important thing for them. What's more, the importance of one's mother tongue must be emphasized before any other language.

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## Video Segment Comprehension Strategies: Male and Female University Students

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate video comprehension strategies used by male and female university students. The researcher designed a video comprehension strategy questionnaire including cognitive, compensation, and memory categories. Totally, 168 Taiwanese university participants completed the questionnaire. The quantitative results demonstrate that first, regarding three categories, both males and females utilized memory strategies most frequently. Second, among 18 strategies, females used concrete referents in video segments most frequently, and for males, to retrieve world knowledge. Third, most males were unlikely to repeat the utterances orally; most females do not use their domain knowledge. Fourth, out of 18 strategies, four memory strategies and three cognitive strategies demonstrated significant differences between male and female strategy employment. Fifth, there existed positive and negative correlations between individual strategies and male video comprehension; three strategies were positively related to female video comprehension. Instructional recommendations were presented for effective video comprehension instruction.

**Keywords:** Comprehension instruction, Cognitive strategies, Compensation strategies, Memory strategies, Gender, Video segments

### 1. Introduction

To foster language learners' comprehension of text presented in the target language, one of the most effective tools of language instruction is multimedia. In the field of second language (L2), instructors have been making efforts to integrate technology into their pedagogical theories and hence design learning situations in the classroom similar to those that naturally occur in the world of the target language (Sherman, 2003). With regard to this goal of conveying a rich form of realism, L2 comprehension teaching curriculum aims at using authentic teaching materials, stressing the importance of making drills contextually appropriate and placing an emphasis on meaningful learning in the classroom. The reviewed literature on language learning strategy research demonstrated that most reading comprehension research focused on how language learners utilize strategy to comprehend verbal and written text on paper. In contrast, little research investigated learners' strategy application in situations when they view visualized text containing verbal and nonverbal information on video. The area of video comprehension strategies has thus not been developed fully. The current study emphasizes the need to integrate visualized material (video) into the curriculum of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), especially in the context where English native speakers and authentic materials are not sufficient. The current study was to investigate comprehension strategies used by EFL learners when viewing video via computers.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1 Computer-Based Video Instruction

Educational historians probably will note that the decades of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were a period of intensive research on the use of media to stimulate learning in more or less formal classroom settings (Cohen, Ebeling, & Kulik, 1981). More recently, there is an increasing tendency to apply multimedia tools in learning and teaching to equip students with the competence to handle real world challenges and provide teachers with a variety of resources (Flanagan, 2005; Marchionini, 2008; McHale, 2008; McLellan, 2008). By multimedia, Mayer (2005) defined it as information displayed through various processes including text, audio, graphics, animation, and video. Moreover, advanced multimedia tools which possess stronger ability, for example, without the limitation of time and place, may replace traditional teaching and learning methods gradually, especially in the settings without sufficient teaching resources (Buckley & Smith, 2007). In general, the research results demonstrated positive effects of multimedia on learning (Mayer, 2001, 2005).

Technology plays an essential role in assisting language learning directly. Bulter-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) provided

the computer programs to English language learners from elementary school through college in the U.S.A. Upon reflection of research outcomes around computer technology in language learning programs, it was acknowledged that tremendous potential of technology for learning, especially second language (L2) learning. Furthermore, computer-based strategy training was developed to enhance language learners' L2 text comprehension and strategy use and the effect of computerized instruction is significant (Dryer & Nel, 2003; Sung, Chang, & Huang, 2007).

Research in second language acquisition has clearly suggested the need of comprehensive input in order for second language learning to take place. With this perspective, the instruction and teaching material should be comprehensible to the learner (Krashen, 1985, 2002). Traditionally, most language teachers have used their facial expressions, intonation and gestures to convey the meaning of the text, or even have relied on various kinds of still pictures, realistic objects to lead the learner to formulate concrete concepts of the text. However, what instructors have traditionally done is quite limited to transfer the abundant information contained in the teaching material into comprehensible input. Computer-based video segments can thus address the problem.

Video viewing can enhance understanding of concepts that are intricate to verbally explain (White, Easton, & Anderson, 2000). Video with its visual and animated features can be a powerful addition to second language acquisition. In the field of research on multimedia education, Ciccone (1995) asserted that video was useful for visualizing processes, could clarify complex ideas and make them easier to remember. Thus, visuals that provide concrete referents for concepts play an essential role in fostering learners' comprehension (Heinich, Molenda, & Russell, 2002). With these documented benefits, videos can be used in academic contexts for various instructional purposes. Moreover, with the astonishing advancement of technology, video recordings can nowadays be played via computers. Also, computers are the tools popular within regular family units and in academic-area classrooms. Chapelle (2005) enumerated a number of benefits of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and proposed suggestions for integrating CALL into interactionist theories of L2 learning and teaching. Thus, language learning and teaching through videos via computers appears promising.

## 2.2 Comprehension Strategy Research

### 2.2.1 Language Learning Strategies

Strategy usage in learning languages has received a great deal of attention from both researchers and language teaching professionals in the past two decades. With vast amounts of empirical research, language learning strategies (LLSs) consistently have emerged as a particularly prominent research path. There is research evidence that suggests that the use of LLSs is related to language performance (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Park, 1997) and that strategies can be taught (Vance, 1999).

Previous studies on LLSs have indicated that strategy use is significantly related to variables such as cultural setting, instructional context, and type of language performance required (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Moreover, findings from several prominent research studies have also indicated significant variation in learning strategy preferences based on individual variables including gender, academic background, age and target language proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995; Park, 1997; Lee & Oxford, 2008; O'Malley, et al., 1985).

Among these individual variables, gender has been shown to be a significant variable in strategy use in learning (Brown, 2007) but gender-difference research has not been fully reported in second language learning, needless to say in the field where technology is applied to assist second language learning. Gurian and Henley (2001) pointed out there indeed existed developmental and structural differences between males and females in terms of perspectives on brain-based research and listed a number of categories of male-female difference to consider in various educational settings. However, in reality, "it lacked sensitivity and clarity about what individual girls need and what individual boys need" (Gurian & Henley, 2001, p. 9). In regard to Oxford's LLSs research, some empirical studies show that women are different from men in language learning strategy usage, with women generally applying more strategies than men, but not in all cases (Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Green & Oxford, 1995; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Lee & Oh, 2001; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman (1988) summarized four studies concerning gender differences in language learning strategies. According to Green and Oxford (1995), 15 out of 50 strategies on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, Oxford, 1990) showed differences between women and men in terms of strategy usage. Oxford and Ehrman's (1995) study also revealed that women used strategies more frequently than men. More recently, Lan and Oxford (2003) found that with Taiwanese children's SILL, out of 50 strategies there were eleven significant differences in strategy usage between girls and boys, with these differences in favor of greater strategy use by girls.

As to the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, males and females differed from each other in strategy usage. For example, Bacon's (1992) study confirmed that men and women used listening strategies differently. Maubach and Morgan (2001) reported that among high school learners of French and German, men engaged in more spontaneous speaking strategies whereas women use organizational strategies in written work more effectively.

In contrast to these significant gender differences, there are also studies demonstrating ambiguous distinction in strategy use between males and females (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Oh, 1996; Park, 1999). For example, it is problematic to distinguish whether males or females favor metacognitive strategies. Zimmerman and Martinez-pons (1990) discovered that girls used metacognitive strategies, such as goal-setting, planning, keeping records, and monitoring, more than boys. In contrast, Phakiti (2003) established that male university students in Thailand reported significantly higher use of metacognitive strategies than females. Furthermore, Kaylani (1996) asserted out that girls were different from boys in strategy use not because of gender variable only, but because of gender in relation to language proficiency. The research conducted by Lee and Oxford (2008) also revealed that gender in isolation did not have significant impact on strategy usage; however, gender showed significant interaction effects accompanying with other variables, such as major, English proficiency, self-image and conception of importance of English. Therefore, the effects of gender on video comprehension strategy usage required further examination.

From the above gender comparison studies, several gaps were perceived. First, the results are limited to how two groups of learners apply strategy to comprehend traditional paper-printed materials. Instead, the contrast between male and female strategy use in comprehending video segments had not been investigated yet. Second, the research results reported statistic differences between males and females in strategy usage but did not present why boys and girls use strategies differently in terms of the scientific evidence that documents the many biological gender differences. For example, girls' brains mature earlier than boys'; girls have better verbal abilities and rely mainly on verbal communication; boys rely chiefly on nonverbal communication (Gurian, & Henley, 2001).

### 2.2.2. Video Comprehension Strategies

The important role of LLSs in the teaching and learning process has been argued by LLS experts (Cohen, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Thus there are various ways to classify the strategies. Among them, Oxford (1990) divided LLSs into two classes: direct strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social). Another widely accepted LLS taxonomy is O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification based on cognitive theory. Using students of Spanish and Russian as participants, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identified three types of strategies such as, cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective. Considering the two major LLS taxonomy, this study would like to adopt Oxford's direct strategy taxonomy. The reasons are that first, as Cohen (1998) pointed out that it can be problematic to deduce from the two distinctions, cognition and metacognition, that it might not be possible to precisely differentiate between cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies for certain summarizing tasks. To avoid this vague classification, the present study focused on cognition factors examining how learners processed information. Second, learners are the center of strategy usage and the study should focus on how learners directly utilizes and remembers information in video segments. As a result, direct dimension of strategies were examined in which cognitive, compensation and memory strategies were further investigated when English learners viewed video segments. Following Oxford's definition (1990), compensation strategies, such as guessing or inferencing, allow the learners to use the language despite large gaps in their linguistic knowledge, especially limited vocabulary knowledge; memory strategies, such as grouping or reviewing, assist learners to store new information and retrieve previously stored information; cognitive strategies, ranging from repeating to analyzing expressions to summarizing, enable learners to understand and use a new language through various media.

The comprehension of videos is somewhat like the comprehension of printed text with verbal and nonverbal signals. Earlier strategy research paid considerable attention to the strategies manipulating verbal information, such as vocabulary, reading and listening strategy research. Video segments contain much richer sources of information than are available in printed material (Bransford, et al., 1990). In video segments, background music, scenes of cities, objects, gestures, facial expressions and affective states, and so on, always accompany the speakers' utterances. In order to differentiate from earlier studies, the current study emphasized how learners applied nonverbal information to comprehend the video. The strategies included in this questionnaire can be those involved learners in using nonlinguistic or paralinguistic cues to comprehend the content of video segments, or applying nonverbal signals, to take notes or form mental representations.

Students can vary in their abilities to interpret visuals (Heinich, et al., 2002). Some students can successfully understand the content of video segments whereas others may confront comprehension failures. To have a significant improvement in understanding the video, the student needs to learn the expertise of video comprehension strategies. Unfortunately, from the reviewed research, there are few studies focusing on comprehension strategies of viewing video segments. The outcomes of this current study are expected to provide valuable knowledge about English learners' video comprehension strategies and also significantly contribute to English instruction. The purpose of the study is to investigate video comprehension strategies used by male and female university students. The four research questions addressed are:

- 1) Which category of video comprehension strategies do male and female participants use to comprehend video-based material most and least frequently?

- 2) What individual video comprehension strategies do male and female participants use to comprehend video-based material most and least frequently?
- 3) Are there any differences between female and male participants' video comprehension strategy use?
- 4) What is the relationship between the respondents of both genders' strategy usage and video comprehension?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

In total, 168 students studying English courses in a public Taiwanese university participated in this study. The sample included 99 male and 69 female students whose mother language was Chinese. The students' English study duration ranged from six to ten years. Students who had been in English speaking countries for over one year were excluded from this study. Furthermore, all participants were volunteers and represented a range of ability in English.

#### 3.2 Research Instruments

##### 3.2.1 Topic Interest Questionnaire

The topics which the participants felt interested in were selected. The rationale was that earlier research demonstrated the positive effects of the topic interest on the participant's reading comprehension (Carrell & Wise, 1998). A topic-interest survey was conducted to establish which topic the participants felt interested in. As a result, three topics with the highest accumulated scores were selected.

##### 3.2.2 Video Segments

Three video segments were selected from CNN news 2006 video archives, which are part of an online program issued by a local language learning publishing company in Taiwan. The length of the segments ranged from 335 words to 370 words and the speed varied between 143 words to 162 words per minute.

##### 3.2.3. Video-Viewing Follow-up Tests

There were three follow-up tests pertaining to measuring the participants' video comprehension. Each test followed the same format: participants answered five multiple-choice questions and ten gap-filling questions according to the content of the assigned video segment. The total score of each test was 15 points, with one correct response worth one point. The alphas for three posttests were .81, .82 and .78 respectively.

##### 3.2.4 Video Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire

Upon close examination of the strategy categories from previous studies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift, 1996; 1997), the author developed a new questionnaire to investigate the participant's video comprehension strategy usage. This questionnaire was administered with four intact classes. The internal consistency of the translated version of the newly developed questionnaire was tested ( $\alpha = .81$ ). The questionnaire contained three major strategy categories and 18 items: compensation category (five strategies), memory category (eight strategies) and cognitive category (five strategies). See Appendix for the video comprehension strategy (VCS) questionnaire.

#### 3.3 Research Procedure and Data Analysis

The primary aim of the study was to investigate the strategies used by male and female learners to understand the content of English video by means of the strategy questionnaire survey. This study contained three sections: first, selecting the target video segments, second, video-viewing in class, and third, filling out the VCS questionnaire. In the first section the topic interest questionnaire was conducted to select the target video segments. In the second section, the computer-based video viewing started. Without any instructional activity, participants viewed one segment per week in an English class. Viewing time for the video segment was around 30 minutes. After the participants finished viewing one clip, they completed a video-viewing follow-up test. This video viewing section lasted for three weeks. In the third section, the participants filled out the VCS questionnaire after viewing three video segments.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using the statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 15.0). In total, there were 168 pieces of questionnaire data collected and analyzed. The participant's response to each item was added up and divided by the total number of participants and multiplied 100% to receive the percentage scores. With percentage scores, the mostly and least used individual strategies and strategy type can be summarized. Furthermore, independent *t*-tests were further employed to examine whether there were significant differences between male and female participants in strategy use. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether males and females' strategy use is related to their video comprehension respectively. This is a two-tailed test with  $\alpha = .05$ .

### 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, these quantitative results have been presented in five facets: strategy category, mostly used strategies, least used strategies, differences in strategy usage, and relationships between males and females' strategy usage and their video comprehension.

#### 4.1 Video Comprehension Strategy Category

[Table 1 near here.]

First of all, with regard to strategy categories, the taxonomy of video comprehension strategies proposed by Oxford (1990) proved to be useful for describing the strategic behaviors applied by these EFL learners. As shown in Table 1, male participants appeared to utilize primarily memory strategies (Mean = 3.8, SD = 1.66), followed by compensation strategies (Mean = 2.25, SD = 1.3) and cognitive strategies (Mean = 1.84, SD = 1.12). For female participants, memory strategies (Mean = 3.21, SD = 1.34) were also used most frequently, followed by cognitive strategies (Mean = 2.17, SD = 1.11) and compensation strategies (Mean = 2.08, SD = 1.06). There were significant differences between males and females in the application of memory and cognitive strategies. Males significantly used more memory strategies than their female counterparts whereas females significantly applied more cognitive strategies than males.

Based on Kintsch's (1998) comprehension model of multiple representations, the present study investigated video comprehension strategies in three phases: compensation, memory and cognitive. The results confirm that the participants flexibly applied these types of strategies to handle verbal and nonverbal information in the video segment. This study found that memory strategies were the most frequently employed approach for males and females in the computer-based video viewing situation. This may be attributed to Taiwanese culture wherein, most students prepared for the entrance examinations to enter senior high schools and universities. They recite details in textbooks to achieve high scores on exams; as a result, they were trained with memory strategies and utilize them frequently in their studying.

#### 4.2 Mostly Used Video Comprehension Strategies

The discussion of the mostly used strategies includes the ones in each strategy category and among 18 strategies. The strategies ranked with the highest percentage scores by this group of participants are the frequently used. In general, among 18 strategies, the most used strategy for females (65%) is Item 5 to utilize physical objects and direct activities in video segments, and for males (70%), Item 7 to retrieve world knowledge. Among the five compensation strategies, Item 5 is the strategy used by most male and female participants. That is, respondents of both genders tended to use concrete situational referents to guess the meaning of unknown words with over 60 percent of males and females agreeing (see Figure 1). This can likely be attributed to the learning process, where learners have to make inferences from what people say, and on the basis of what happens in the environment and the mind. When acquiring the meanings of words, learners begin with the concrete (Heinich, Molenda, & Russell, 2002; Steinberg & Sciarin, 2006). The referents in the video segments included the scene and props. They were the objects that could be directly observed in the physical environment and thus caught male and female participants' attention at first glance. Among the six memory strategies, Item 7 is mostly used by males and Item 12, by females. That is, 70% of males liked to refer to knowledge and experience gained from life; 64% of females preferred to connect the scene with Chinese words or phrases (see Figure 2). The mostly used cognitive strategies generally used by males and females are Item 16 and Item 18 respectively. That is, 65% of males preferred to catch key concepts in the video and 62% of females tended to understand the details (see Figure 3).

[Figure 1 near here.]

[Figure 2 near here.]

[Figure 3 near here.]

Gurian and Henley's opinions (2001) about gender contrast in learning style may explain these results. One difference in strategy use is that males and females use different reasoning processes and logic thinking styles. For example, males tended to be "deductive in their conceptualizations, starting their reasoning process frequently from general principle" whereas females prefer "inductive thinking, adding more and more to their base of conceptualization" (p.44). It is also true that males like "abstract arguments, philosophical conundrums, and moral debates about abstract principles" (p. 45). Instead, females would like to "have things conceptualized in usable, everyday language, replete with concrete details" (p. 46). A second difference is that males ask for evidence for other's claim but females generally pay more attention to "the plethora of details in a lesson or conversation" (p. 46). Concerning the results found in this study, males and females tend to use different strategies to comprehend video materials in light of their different learning styles.

#### 4.3 Least Used Video Comprehension Strategies

Within each section of compensation, memory and cognitive, the lowest percentage scores are regarded as the least used strategies. An overall view of 18 strategies, the result shows that Item 15 with 14 % was males' least frequently used strategy; Item 8 with 17% was females' least used strategy. The findings suggest that most males are unlikely to repeat the utterances orally; most females do not use their domain knowledge. Regarding compensation strategies, both male and female participants ranked Item 3 as the least used strategy, with 30% of males and 21% of females (see Figure 1). That is, the respondents of both genders did not like to use background sounds or music to comprehend the content.

This is probably because in most English classes in Taiwan, most students prepared themselves with the skills to do paper-pencil tests. They were seldom asked to do oral practice. Furthermore, two male participants stated that they viewed video segments to learn some vocabulary so they simply focused attention on the subtitle to identify unfamiliar words. Under such conditions when they viewed video segments, they involved themselves mostly in the task of reading written words rather than perceiving it as a listening task. Among eight memory strategies, Item 13 is the least used strategy for males and Item 8, for their female counterparts. That is, only 28% of males replayed the video and only 17% of females used domain knowledge to understand the content (see Figure 2). Some females expressed that the topics of these video segments were not related to their majors so they did not rely on their academic background knowledge. As to cognitive strategies, both male and female participants ranked Item 15 as the least utilized strategy. The findings suggest that neither females nor males liked to repeat a series of sounds pronounced by the speakers. In addition, outcome shows that Item 14 was another strategy least frequently used by females (see Figure 3). That is, most females did not like to use graphic, or numerical forms to write down the concepts, either. According to Gurain and Henley's study (2001), females prefer concrete examples, and do not like to use abstract coded language to take notes.

#### 4.4 Differences between Female and Male Strategy Usage

[Table 2 near here.]

Out of 18 strategies, seven strategies demonstrated significant differences between male and female strategy employment (see Table 2). Within the seven significant strategies, four of them are Memory strategies; the other three are Cognitive strategies. None of the Compensation strategies achieved any significant gender differences.

For significant results of the three memory strategies, Items 6, 7, and 8, the percentage scores of male participants are significantly higher than female participants'. That is, most males tended to use their personal experience, world knowledge and domain knowledge to comprehend the content of video segments. On the other hand, the results of Item 12 indicated that the percentage scores of female respondents are significantly higher than male respondents'. That is, females linked the scene and the sound in the video with Chinese words, phrases or sentences more frequently than males. In regard to three cognitive strategies, the percentage scores of females are all significantly higher than their male counterparts. These statistically significant results show that female participants obviously employed Item 14 and Item 15 more often than males, but with only 32% of females using graphs and numbers to write down their concepts and repeating a stream of utterance, while less than 20% of males utilized the two strategies. For the two cognitive strategies, the statistically different results are distinguished but the low percentage scores are regarded as low frequency. It cannot be concluded that males and females diverge significantly in using the two strategies. However, when it comes to distinct strategy use, male and female learners really are different. This finding suggests that a rather small number of males liked to utilize the two cognitive strategies to comprehend the video. For the last significant result, with 45% of males selecting Item 18 to comprehend the video segment, over 60% of females liked replaying the segment to have a further understanding of the details. This result has been explained in the above section of mostly used strategies. Males and females are different in deductive and inductive reasoning, and abstract and concrete reasoning (Gurian, & Henley, 2001).

#### 4.5 Relationships between the Respondents of Both Genders' Strategy Usage and Video Comprehension

Pearson correlation analysis was first conducted to examine whether there was significant relationship between male and females' strategy use and their video comprehension. For male participants, the correlation results confirm that there were two significant correlations between the use of individual strategies and male participants' scores of the video comprehension test, with Item 12 ( $r = -.28, p = .005 < .05$ ) and Item 16 ( $r = .25, p = .01 < .05$ ). There exist positive and negative correlations between individual strategies and male video comprehension. These findings suggest that males did not achieve high scores in the video-viewing follow-up test when they used Chinese to remember the image and sound; however, the more main ideas in the video males comprehended, the higher scores they achieved.

Concerning female participants, the results show that there were three significant correlations between females' individual strategy use and their scores of the video-viewing follow-up test. The correlations of the three items are positive, with Item 11 ( $r = .30, p = .013 < .05$ ), Item 13 ( $r = .31, p = .01 < .05$ ) and item 14 ( $r = .28, p = .02 < .05$ ). This result demonstrates that some strategies are positively related to female video comprehension. These findings suggest that the more English used by females to connect with the image and the sound in the video, the more times females replay the video clip, and the more often females use graphs and numbers to write down key concepts, the higher scores they achieve in the video comprehension test.

### 5. Conclusion

In general, the results of this study demonstrate that gender differences are reflected in the ways that males and females use different strategies to understand English video segments displayed on computer. Differences in strategy usage are not obstacles to prohibit both genders from comprehending, learning or retrieving information successfully in the text. Instructors should "help the learners become comfortably and fully themselves – accepting their differences, celebrating



their natural strengths, and aiding them in compensating for their natural weakness” (Gurian, & Henley, p. 19). Video comprehension strategies discussed in this study were not the exclusive preserves of either gender group, but could be learned by the opposite sex of learners who had not discovered them on their own.

Armed with the general results of the study, some instructional recommendations are presented. First, concrete referents in video are useful to comprehension. Teachers can demonstrate some specific props and settings to students before video viewing. By doing so, students may activate their knowledge relative to the targets and thus pay attention to them during the process of viewing. After the viewing, instructors may repeat specific scenes to reinforce learners’ content memory. Further, the teacher should select a video containing sufficient concrete referents.

Second, world knowledge plays an important role in the process of learner video comprehension. Kintsch (1998) conceptualized comprehension as a paradigm for cognition and stated that all cognitive processes require knowledge. Speaking of comprehensive understanding of video, knowledge hence plays an important role. Teachers should select video segments with familiar topics to the students. In the process of viewing such video materials, students may have abundant knowledge resources to consult with.

Third, key concepts provide effective comprehension. Thus it is recommended teachers train the students the strategy of grasping key points. For strategy reinforcement, teachers may conduct several activities themed at key concepts, such as listing for key concepts or writing a brief summary following video viewing.

Fourth, it is recommended that language professionals improve learners English speaking and listening skills. Teachers could expose learners to an English verbal and aural environment. This is because video segments are partly featured with sound. Afterwards, learners could practice pronouncing English words, reading aloud a sentence and repeating the stream of sounds produced by native English speakers. With such practice, they can thus understand video clips better.

Fifth, language professionals should provide pre-viewing activities introducing the speakers’ backgrounds and their relationship. By distinguishing the social relations between speaker and receiver, learners may predict the content of the segments. The different relationships may demonstrate various speaking styles and contents. For example, a conversation between teacher and student can be a formal discourse related to topics on academic spheres; conversely, a conversation between acquaintances can be informal and leisurely with topics on personal relationships.

The current study results add new knowledge in the field of LLS research and computer-based education, and generates new opportunities for professional dialogue about the understanding of text comprehension via video segments. Further research is recommended to find a holistic view of how language learners comprehend text in aural and written formats using computers as a major media. Therefore, the researcher would like to conduct qualitative research exploring the process of how video viewers comprehend verbal (spoken and written words) and nonverbal (pictorial images) information.

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## Appendix

### *Video Comprehension Strategy Questionnaire*

The purpose of the questionnaire is to investigate the strategies you used to comprehend the video segment. Please put a check mark, ✓, in the box if you used the strategy.

- ☐ 1. Using tone of voice (intonation or stress) and pauses in an utterance.
- ☐ 2. Using a speaker's facial expressions, body language, and hand movements.
- ☐ 3. Using background sounds or music in the video.
- ☐ 4. Using relationships between speakers in an oral text.
- ☐ 5. Using concrete situational referents.
- ☐ 6. Referring to personal life experience.
- ☐ 7. Referring to knowledge gained from experience in the world.
- ☐ 8. Using domain knowledge gained in academic situations.
- ☐ 9. Analyzing the theme (such as business, traveling, technology).
- ☐ 10. Using mental or actual pictures or visuals to represent information.
- ☐ 11. Trying to remember the scene or the image with English.
- ☐ 12. Trying to remember the scene or the image with Chinese.
- ☐ 13. Replaying the video to read and listen to the words.
- ☐ 14. Use graphics or numerical forms to writing down the concepts.
- ☐ 15. Repeating a series of sounds pronounced by the speakers.
- ☐ 16. Catching the main ideas of the clip.
- ☐ 17. Reviewing the scene for main ideas.
- ☐ 18. Reviewing the scene for details.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of males and females' application of strategy category

Strategy Category	Male ( <i>n</i> = 102)		Female ( <i>n</i> = 66)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Compensation	2.25	1.30	2.08	1.06	0.88	0.38
Memory	3.80	1.66	3.21	1.34	2.43	0.01*
Cognitive	1.84	1.12	2.17	1.12	-1.83	0.07*

\*  $p < .05$ 

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of video comprehension strategies of males and females

Strategy Category	Item	Male ( <i>n</i> = 102)		Female ( <i>n</i> = 66)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Compensation	I1	0.41	0.50	0.45	0.50	-0.54	0.59
	I2	0.53	0.50	0.45	0.50	0.95	0.35
	I3	0.30	0.46	0.21	0.41	1.31	0.19
	I4	0.40	0.49	0.30	0.46	1.30	0.20
	I5	0.60	0.49	0.65	0.48	-0.69	0.49
Memory	I6	0.58	0.50	0.35	0.48	2.97	0.00*
	I7	0.70	0.46	0.52	0.50	2.39	0.02*
	I8	0.35	0.48	0.17	0.38	2.67	0.01*
	I9	0.58	0.50	0.48	0.50	1.19	0.24
	I10	0.47	0.50	0.38	0.49	1.17	0.24
Cognitive	I11	0.38	0.49	0.38	0.49	0.05	0.96
	I12	0.46	0.50	0.64	0.49	-2.25	0.03*
	I13	0.28	0.45	0.30	0.46	-0.26	0.80
	I14	0.19	0.39	0.32	0.47	-1.97	0.04*
	I15	0.14	0.35	0.32	0.47	-2.87	0.01*
	I16	0.65	0.48	0.58	0.50	0.93	0.36
	I17	0.42	0.50	0.33	0.48	1.14	0.25
	I18	0.45	0.50	0.62	0.49	-2.17	0.03*

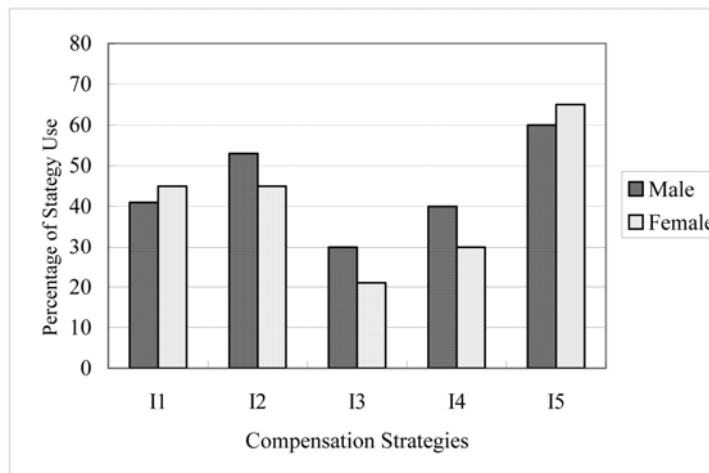
\*  $p < .05$ 

Figure 1. Frequency of male and female compensation strategy usage

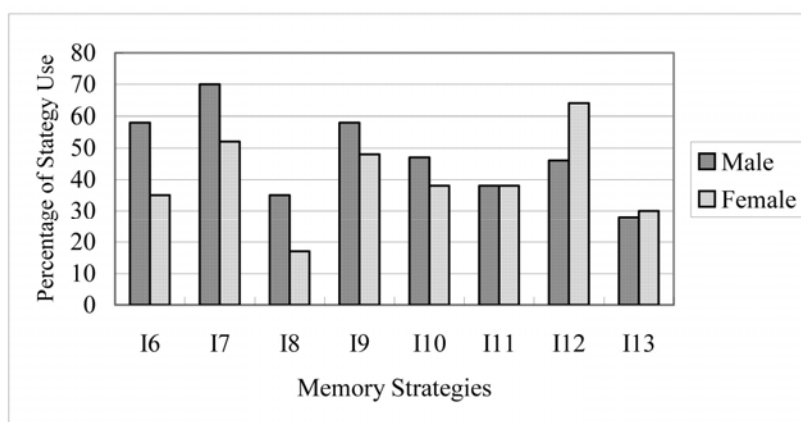


Figure 2. Frequency of male and female memory strategy usage

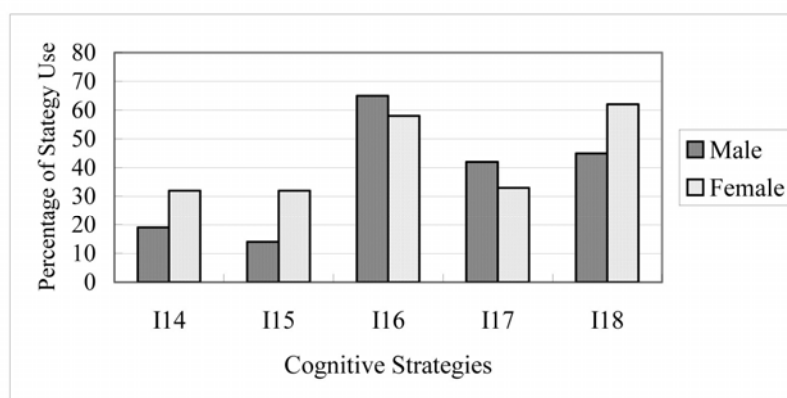


Figure 3. Frequency of male and female cognitive strategy usage



## On the Practice Teaching of English Reading

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### Abstract

The main task of practice teaching of English Reading is to train students' independent reading ability and good reading habits. Extra-curricular reading of English literature and English newspapers and magazines plays an active role in improving English reading ability. The principle of selecting reading materials, the scope of selection and the organization of teaching are essential to effective practice teaching. The practice teaching of English Reading can not only cultivate among the students a self-learning ability, but also allow students to expand horizons through a wide range of extra-curricular reading, and learn more about the society and culture of the nations related to teaching.

**Keywords:** English Reading, practice teaching, English literature, English newspapers

English Reading (English Extensive Reading) is a course which carries out a great deal of reading practice and training. But the teaching time of English Reading is limited, there are only two hours per week, thus, extra-curricular reading has become particularly important. Extra-curricular learning and practice is an extension and expansion of the classroom teaching, it is an important way of training and developing students ability. If teachers can guide correctly and effectively organize students to read some of English literature and English newspapers, practice teaching can not only cultivate students' good reading ability, but also enable them learn more socio-cultural and natural background knowledge related to teaching and expand horizons through a wide range of extra-curricular reading, at the same time develop their noble humanistic spirit.

### I. The principle of selecting reading materials

According to Xiao Liquan, selecting reading materials should follow seven principles: 1. The principle of moderate difficulty. 2. The principle of the-more-the-better. 3. The principle of applicable content. 4. The principle of diversity. 5. The principle of linguistic authenticity. 6. The principle of combining learning with acquisition. 7. The principle of sense of success. It is necessary to ensure an appropriate level of difficulty when choosing reading materials. They should not be too difficult, not too easy, neither. In a sense, the more reading materials, the better. Only through reading a large number of language materials can the changes from quantity to quality be achieved, students' reading ability could be improved. What's more, reading materials should be varied, could meet the needs of the majority of students, so that students can get a sense of achievement. Only in this way can students be more likely to concentrate on reading. In short, the choice of reading materials must proceed from actual conditions, and also keep in view the overall development of students and long-term interests.

Christine Nuttall suggests that we use the acronym **SAVE** to summarize the main criteria for choosing extensive reading materials:

**S Short.** The length of the book must not be intimidating. Anyone undertaking extensive reading for the first time need short books (articles) that they can finish quickly, to avoid becoming bored or discouraged.

**A Appealing** The books (articles) must genuinely appeal to the intended readers. It helps if they look attractive, are well printed and have (colored) illustrations—more pictures and bigger print for elementary students. They should look like the books we buy from choice, not smell of the classroom—notes and questions unobtrusive or excluded.

**V Varied** There must be a wide choice suiting the various needs of the readers in terms of content, language and intellectual maturity.

**E Easy** The level must be easier than that of the course book. We cannot expect people to read from choice, or to read fluently, if the language is a struggle. Improvement comes from reading a lot of easy material.

### II. Reading English literature

#### 2.1 Reading literature plays an active role in improving English reading ability

##### 2.1.1 Reading literature, developing and stimulating interest in reading, expanding vocabulary

Reading literature can mold our temperament and open up our spirit space. English literature, especially novels, can deeply move readers, infect the readers' emotions with their distinct characters, the vivid language and the plot of ups and downs. They give vent to our own emotions, let us shed tears, smile and laugh, love and hate. How can such kind of

reading not arouse the readers to read with a strong desire and great interest? Literature is based on language as a tool to reflect the life vividly, to express the author's social awareness and emotion with a variety of literary forms, its language arts is one of the qualities to attract readers. Take English literature, it attaches much importance to being real, simple, it uses unaffected language, at the same time, it creates a large number of new words, new structures, pursues fantasy effect, pushing the language expression to the limits. Reading literary works can greatly expand the vocabulary and understand its language arts virtually.

### 2.1.2 Reading literary works, improving English reading comprehension

Reading literature is a kind of independent reading behavior for students, they can "walk" in a book in a relaxed mentality, to get to know all sorts of characters who are coming one by one, in groups, with the imprint of history, disseminating a rich culture and following the rhythm of the times. In the process of reading, a variety of reading skills can be applied to, such as skimming, scanning, study reading, guessing word and so on. While reading the chapters which are attractive, you can read repeatedly to appreciate the characters' inner world, to grasp the complicated and touching plot, to understand the writer's some sort of complex permeating in the book. Reading minor or dull plot, you can read superficially like a dragonfly skimming over the water, using scanning to search for the paragraphs and expressions of the story needed for convergence in order to continue the development of understanding of the story. Encountered new words which are difficult to understand, you can guess meanings according to the context of the story and the characters' dialogues. As for passages with simple plot and few new words, you can use skimming. In short, by reading literature, we can not only train students in a variety of reading skills, but also train students' appreciating ability to read. Nevertheless, it is more effective to improve reading ability in active reading than reading in order to practice reading skills.

### 2.1.3 Reading literature to understand the culture of English-speaking countries, enriching the soul

Reading literature can make people able to understand society and reflect on life. Literature is a cultural manifestation, is the aesthetic reflection of life and times, is the essence of culture and civilization. Novels have entertainment features, more importantly, a fine novel bears the weight of mainstream values of a nation, a civilization and an era. What it expresses is a social and moral concern. In addition, literature can enrich the human soul. Literature is a heart-to-heart communication, it can lead us most deeply close to the human soul, and can more clearly show the meaning of life. Reading literature will be a moving experience. Literary works, especially the classics, have beautiful language, clever structure, real environment description and realistic character delineation. With the praise of the true, the good and the beautiful, the slashing of the false, the evil and the ugly, the comprehensive perspective of various strata of society, the care of human fate, as well as the strong desire of Health, literature give readers enlightenment and shake, thinking and incentives, which have high aesthetic value. Reading literature is a richness of their knowledge, and a richness of their souls, either.

## 2.2 The selection and reading of English literature

The Steering Committee of Foreign Language Teaching of Colleges and Universities has recommended 118 books for English majors of the institutions of higher learning, including 49 English Literature, 41 American Literature, 7 Canadian Literature, 9 Australian literature, 12 Chinese culture, such as: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*; Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*; Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and *The Golden Notebook*; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, which are all fine literature.

Reading literary works can be easy-to-digest, from the simple to the original step-by-step. The requirements for English Reading II by The Syllabus for English Majors in Colleges and Universities are: to read simple materials equivalent of *Thirty-Nine Steeps* (a simplified version) as well as *Reader's Digest*; requirements for English Reading IV are to read international news coverage equivalent of the *Newsweek* of the United States, to read the original literature equivalent of *Sons and Lovers*. The main task of English Reading practice teaching is to train students in independent reading skills and good reading habits, so that they can be ready to learn for high grades. In our University, the practice teaching of English reading is throughout the first two years, a total of 15 hours. Students are required to choose 15 easy-reading books from the recommended, they can borrow from the library or search to read from Internet. The formative results are: reading notes, reading reviews, book report, summary etc., a total of 15 papers each student. Students can be completed 0.5 credits after finishing their reading tasks.

## III. Reading English newspapers and periodicals

### 3.1 The significance of reading English newspapers and periodicals

#### 3.1.1. Reading English newspapers, expanding vocabulary

Newspaper Reading provides an expanded vocabulary for students in an effective way. Students can be exposed to today's hottest up-to-date vocabulary. Such as: 1. GFC. This word stems from the Global Financial Crisis, it is the first letters of these three words, currently it refers to the global finance crisis in 2008. 2. Toxic debt. This word is related to

GFC, which means the initial borrowing is all normal, then the debt becomes worthless, such as the subprime mortgage which triggers GFC of the United States. 3. Machinima. It means “three-dimensional computer video”. This word is synthesized by “machine” and “cinema” 4. Mockbuster. It refers to the low-cost film which mocks similar title of large tracts. Large tract is “blockbuster”. 5. Bromance. It refers to non-sex between two men in intimate relationships. It is the synthesis of two words: brother (brother) and romance (romantic), bro + mance. 6. Bff, three initials from Best Friend Forever. 7. Celeblog, refers to “star blog”. 8. Generation Z, which means the generation born after 2000. This generation has the characteristics of liking computer technology, Internet, mobile communication, at the same time, like to do various things that affect the purchasing decision of parents, they grew up in dual-career families, also known as the New Silent Generation. Reading English newspapers also gives students repeated opportunities to read new words. For example, when the global financial crisis in 2008 broke out, it is reported repeatedly so that we come into contact with a great deal of the financial crisis-related vocabulary and terms. When Obama was elected as President of the United States, we could appreciate a large number of political, economic, social and other fields’ vocabulary around the first black American president’s campaign and election

### 3.1.2 Reading English newspapers and periodicals, intimately contact with Western society and culture

Reading English newspapers and periodicals is, for most students, a gate that opens to the world. Newspapers have the characteristics that are closer to the era, the public, the reality and the daily life. As English teaching and learning materials, newspapers and periodicals have the significant advantages with original content, modern language, plentiful data, and practical terms. Besides learning the latest and most live English language, reading English newspapers can also track the latest political, economic and cultural dynamics of the world and the resulting new knowledge from the press, so that students have more opportunities to be closely contact with the West cultural society. By reading English newspapers and periodicals, students can sense the world without leaving home. It can be said that reading newspapers and periodicals can enable students to develop vision and understanding of exotic customs, enrich their knowledge, and enhance their cultural self-cultivation. In addition, the long-term reading of English newspapers and periodicals can virtually develop sensitivity to cultural factors, the formation of a cross-cultural awareness, and reduce the cultural phenomenon of negative transfer in language learning process.

### 3.1.3 Reading English newspapers, to master reading skills, improve reading ability

Long-term reading of English newspapers and periodicals can also improve students’ reading skills and reading comprehension. A news story is composed of headline, lead, body and ending. The headline is the heading printed in large letters above a story in a newspaper, it must lure its readers to spend enough time for the lead, if not the whole story, so we say that a headline usually meet two requirements—to capture the essence of the event and to attract readers’ attention. Like headlines, leads which are often the first one or two paragraphs of a news story, must also capture the essence of the event and lure readers into the story. Usually the body of a news story has inverted pyramid structure, the pyramid structure and multi-foot tripod structure. Inverted pyramid structure is mostly used in modern English news. Mastering the discourse structure of news reporting can quickly improve speed-reading capabilities such as skimming, scanning, etc.

### 3.2 The choice of English newspapers and periodicals

First of all, the choice of English newspapers and periodicals should meet the needs of teaching. It is desirable to choose some of the latest, most popular, and most representative articles as supplementary teaching materials. Here are the Websites of some major newspapers and magazines at home and abroad, which are free of charge at any time browsing:

**China Daily:** <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>

**21st Century:** <http://www.21stcentury.com.cn/?c=21st>

**The Times (UK):** <http://www.thetimes.co.uk>

**The Daily Telegraph (UK):** <http://www.dailytelegraph.co.uk>

**The Observer (UK):** <http://www.observer.co.uk>

**The Financial Times (UK):** <http://news.ft.com/home/rw>

**The Guardian (UK):** <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

**The Economist (UK):** <http://www.economist.com>

**Daily Mirror (UK):** <http://www.mirror.co.uk/>

**The Sun (UK):** [www.thesun.co.uk](http://www.thesun.co.uk)

**The New York Times (U.S.):** [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

**Washington Post (U.S.):** [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

**Los Angeles Times (U.S.):** [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)



**International Herald Tribune:** www.iht.com

**Christian Science Monitor** (U.S.): www.csmonitor.com

**USA Today** (U.S.): www.usatoday.com

**Time** (U.S.): www.time.com

**Fortune** (U.S.): www.fortune.com

**Reader's Digest** (U.S.): www.rd.com

**Newsweek** (USA): www.Newsweek.com

**Business Week** (U.S.): www.businessweek.com

### 3.3 Reading English newspapers and periodicals

English newspaper reading is an extension of extra-curricular reading, a kind of independent reading behavior. The role of reading teacher is to organize and guide. First of all, the teacher must be clear about the purpose of reading English newspapers, taking into account the timeliness of newspaper articles, being familiar with features of English newspaper style, understanding different reporting methods of news stories, and give students the guidance necessary to read. Secondly, the teaching methods are diversified. Teaching in practice should adhere to the student-centered teaching principles, to stimulate students' interest in reading through various forms. Such as: 1. Writing reading report. Teachers introduce a number of integrated topics, current events, etc. requiring students to collect relevant information to read, and then write a newspaper report. 2. Writing news comments. Allow students to read newspapers of their own interest, or reading teacher chooses some newspaper articles of a moderate level of difficulty, to let students read and write news comments. 3. Regular organizations of newspaper report exchange. Newspaper report exchange can develop students' analytical ability, thinking ability, the ability to put forward ideas and innovative capabilities. It is beneficial to organize newspaper report exchange regularly.

In short, the reading of English literature and English newspapers and periodicals plays an irreplaceable role in enhancing students' reading ability, promoting their cultural awareness and improving their cross-cultural communicative competence. The practice teaching of English Reading has bright prospects: the effective development of the practice teaching of English reading is bound to play a positive role in improving the quality of English Reading.

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## The Impact of Cultural Knowledge on Listening Comprehension of EFL Learners

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### Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of cultural knowledge on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. To achieve this purpose, out of three hundred participants, one hundred and twenty pre-intermediate language learners were selected based on their scores on a listening comprehension test and were randomly assigned to four groups. Each group was exposed to a certain condition as follows: TC (Target Culture), ITC (International Target Culture), SC (Source Culture), and CF (Culture Free). At the end of the experiment, to see whether or not any changes happened regarding their listening proficiency, a post-test was administered to the four groups. The results suggested that the participants performed differently on the post-test indicating that familiarity with culturally-oriented language material promotes the Iranian EFL learners' listening proficiency.

**Keywords:** Listening comprehension, Cultural knowledge, L2 listeners, EFL learners, Source culture, Target culture

### 1. Introduction

Foreign language listening comprehension is a complex process and crucial in the development of foreign language competence; yet, the importance of listening in language learning has only been recognized relatively recently (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Rost, 2002). Since the role of listening comprehension in language learning was either overlooked or undervalued, it merited little research and pedagogical attention in the past. But at present, some researchers have devoted some time to listening and believe it to be an important skill in teaching and learning. For instance, Nunan (1998) believes that, "listening is the basic skill in language learning. Without listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate effectively. In fact over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening" (p. 1).

However, careful observation of school English teaching practice has found that the teaching of listening skills is still the weak link in the language teaching process. Despite students having mastered the basic elements of English grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is often weak. Through systematic study of basic English teaching stages at university, it has been recognized that while students' integrated skills in reading, writing and translating, have been improving, their listening and speaking capabilities have been left behind. The key factor that has been recognized in the preliminary studies is students' limited listening comprehension.

One aspect of language processing widely held as supporting and enhancing comprehension is that of mental schemata. Research in reading supports the notion that activating prior knowledge or knowledge of the world and applying this knowledge to new input greatly facilitates processing and understanding (Graves & Cook, 1980). Listening, like reading, is an active process that entails construction of meaning beyond simple decoding. Activation of what is known about the world clearly assists processing the aural code.

Having a good listening comprehension skill has always been the main concern of not only EFL students, but also their teachers who want to teach English in the authentic context especially for communicative purposes. From the very moment that EFL students start learning English as a foreign language in school, what comes to their minds after listening to the native speaker's speech is to comprehend all the speech which is heard.

More specifically, language carries knowledge and cultural information and it reflects the substantial and particular ways of thinking of that people. Thus culture is embedded in even the simplest act of language (Hao, 2000; Kramsch, 1993); it is an inseparable part of the way in which we live our lives and the way we use language. In this regard, Kramsch (1993) maintains that every time we speak we perform a cultural act. Consequently, there is now, an emphasis in modern language teaching on cultural knowledge as a basis for language learning. An important requirement, then, for learning spoken English, is the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Therefore, if students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and cultural knowledge are to prosper, they must be grounded in a sound knowledge of the society in which the language is based.

As Cook (2003) points out:

The successful interpretation of language (spoken or written) in context depends upon the degree to which the participants share conventions and procedures, including those related to paralinguistic. Such conventions and procedures, together with the values and beliefs behind them, are elements of cultural background knowledge... (p. 52).

The integral relationship between language and culture has led to numerous debates on the role and impact of English language teaching in general and of English language programs in Iran in particular. Ranging from English linguistic imperialism and cultural invasion to cultural neutrality, the interpretations of the state of culture in ELT in Iran is still controversial. According to Aliakbari (2004), in particular, two extreme evaluations of ELT appear in the agenda. On the one hand, English culture as a school subject is seen as representing and introducing western culture to the Iranian students. On the other hand, there are voices postulating that English culture as it is presently taught in Iran is nothing but a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology. This unresolved controversy prompted many recent investigations into the cultural content of ELT in Iran.

## 2. Review of Literature

Listening has long been the neglected skill in second language acquisition, research, teaching, and assessment. However, in recent years there has been an increased focus on L2 listening ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and acquisition. Few empirical studies have explored the potential relationship between prior knowledge and listening comprehension. Mueller (1980) investigated the effects of background knowledge on listening comprehension of locus of contextual visuals for different levels of aptitude of beginning college German students. The aptitude variable consisted of two levels (high and low) determined by the participants' grades in the preceding German course. He found that the students who had the contextual visual before hearing the passage scored significantly higher on the recall measure than those in the visual-after and the no-visual groups.

In order to determine the influence of religion-specific background knowledge on the listening comprehension of ESL students, Markham and Latham (1987) used passages describing prayer rituals of Islam and Christianity. The data indicated that religious background influences listening comprehension. The subjects in this study recalled more information and provided more elaborations and fewer distortions for the passage that related to their own religion.

Long (1990) conducted an exploratory study of background knowledge and L2 listening comprehension. Her third-quarter students of Spanish listened to two passages, one familiar and the other unfamiliar. Comprehension was assessed by a recall protocol in English, a recognition measure, and a checklist comprised of true-false statements referring to the content of the passage. Although the English summaries revealed a higher proportion of correct idea units for the familiar topic, no significant differences were found between the familiar and unfamiliar passages in the recognition measure.

Bacon (1992), conducting an experiment with Spanish students, investigated strategies used in three identified phases: perceptual, parsing, and utilization. After listening to two expository passages selected from Voice of America broadcast, her subjects reported their strategy use and comprehension in an interview situation. Regarding background knowledge, she found little use of advance organizers during the perceptual phase, but effective use of previous knowledge during the utilization phase. She reported that successful listeners tended to use their personal, world, and discourse knowledge while less successful listeners either built erroneous meaning from their prior knowledge or ignored it altogether.

To help teachers discover effective strategies appropriate for ethnic minority students, another study was conducted by Ervin (1992) to see whether listeners better understand material related to their own culture, and whether thematic units are an effective method for building culturally related schemata. Within a pre- and posttest design, a class of 25 Scottish pupils and a class of 21 Texan students (ages 8 to 10 years) listened to a same-culture passage and answered a 10-item multiple-choice test. The groups then listened to another-culture passage and answered a similar test. Students/pupils participated in a one-week other-culture thematic unit and took the other-culture test. T-tests showed no significant difference between same-culture and other-culture pretest scores for the Texan group, but the Scottish group scored significantly higher on the same-culture test than the other-culture test.

Schmidt-Rinehart (1994) also carried out a study with the main purpose of discovering the effects of topic familiarity on L2 listening comprehension. University students of Spanish at three different course levels listened to two familiar passages, one about a familiar topic and another about a novel topic. The passages represented authentic language in that the recordings were from spontaneous speech of a native speaker. The results indicated that the subjects scored considerably higher on the familiar topic than on the new one (see also Caplan-Carbin, 1997).

Sadighi and Zare (2002), in their study, explored the effect of background knowledge on listening comprehension. Two TOEFL preparation classes allocated to EFL students took part in the study. The experimental group received some treatment in the form of topic familiarity, and their background knowledge was activated. Then a 50-item TOEFL test of

listening comprehension was administered to both experimental and control groups. A statistical analysis of the results provides some evidence in support of the effect of background knowledge on listening comprehension.

Later, Othman and Vanathas (2004) also conducted an experiment that focused on topic familiarity and its influence on listening comprehension. Data were elicited from thirty four intermediate level students who were majoring in Business Studies at a private tertiary institution. A comparison between the pretest and posttest scores showed that the subjects achieved significantly higher marks after the treatment lessons. The findings of this study indicated that topic familiarity has an influence on listening comprehension.

Role of culture in language learning and teaching was investigated by Genc and Bada (2005). This study was conducted with the participation of the students of the ELT department of Çukurova University in Turkey. As a result of the study, a significant similarity between the students' views and the theoretical benefits of a culture class as argued by some experts in the field was observed. Regarding the benefits of learning about culture, attending the culture class has raised cultural awareness in ELT students concerning both native and target societies. This study illustrates how arguments of language teaching experts in favor of a culture class in language learning and teaching are justified by some sound evidence provided by the participants of this study.

In another study, the effects of cultural instruction on foreign language learning were investigated by Tsou (2005). For this purpose, the combination of an anthropology process and task-oriented approach was applied to conduct the cultural lessons. Culture instruction was implemented within two elementary EFL classrooms for one semester to see the effects of culture instruction on foreign language learning. When culture lessons were integrated into EFL instruction, students' language proficiency was significantly improved. In addition, they had better interests in language learning.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

According to Sadighi and Zare (2002), listening has been the neglected skill in foreign language acquisition, research, teaching, and assessment. However, in recent years there has been an increased focus on foreign language listening ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and acquisition.

It is the aim of many EFL students, in Iran, to listen to different taped materials or participate in extracurricular teaching programs such as communicating with native speakers of English, listening to English radio programs, watching English movies, etc. However, despite their appeal to different means, they might not gain as much as they desire.

According to Aliakbari (2004), the cultural content of the ELT in Iran has never been explicitly discussed. There is the serious absence of studies that examine the quality and the types of listening comprehension texts used in relation to cultural knowledge. Therefore, the major purpose motivating this study is to find out, whether the available listening comprehension texts provide sufficient context for students' understanding and make them ready for intercultural communication. More specifically, this study is motivated to investigate the relationship between cultural background knowledge and listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

### **4. Research Questions**

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Does familiarity with the target culture (English and American) affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension?
- 2) Does familiarity with international target culture (culture of different foreign countries such as Japan, China and India) affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension?
- 3) Does familiarity with Persian culture (source culture) affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension?
- 4) Do culture free materials have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?

### **5. Research Hypotheses**

The purpose of the present study is to reveal the effect of cultural familiarity on the Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension. The result will, therefore, shed lights on the following hypotheses:

H01. Materials with the target language (English and American) culture orientation do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

H02. Materials with international culture orientation do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

H03. Materials with Persian culture orientation do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

H04. Culture-free materials do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Participants

For the present study, out of three hundred students learning English at two private language institutions of Andimeshk, a city in the south of Iran, a hundred and twenty participants (both male and female) with the age range of 13-25 were selected based on a proficiency test.

### 6.2 Instruments

The following instruments were used in the study:

- 1) First, a listening comprehension test containing 25 multiple-choice items was extracted from Test of English as a Foreign Language (Sharpe, 2001). The reliability of the test was .732 based on KR-21 method.
- 2) Second, there were materials selected from Internet reliable sites (such as *bbc.com* and *cnn.com*) and other authentic sources such as *New Interchange Series* (Richards, 2005). In order to account for the influence of culture on listening comprehension, four types of materials reflecting different cultures were proposed: English and American culture, international target culture, Persian culture and culture-free.

## 7. Procedures

First, the proficiency test (Sharpe, 2001) was given to three hundred EFL learners including both males and females of two private language institutions in Andimeshk. Calculating the scores, 120 participants who scored between 36 and 64 out of 100 in the proficiency test (two standard deviations above and below the mean) were selected as pre-intermediate language learners; later, based on systematic random sampling, they were divided into four groups: group A (Target Culture=TC), group B (International Target Culture=ITC), group C (Source Culture=SC) and group D (Culture-Free=CF). Over the course of 10 weeks (40 hours), classes were conducted two times a week by an experienced teacher in the private language school. The participants in each group practiced listening comprehension materials that reflected a particular culture. Finally, the four groups took a listening comprehension test which included sample authentic listening comprehension materials as mentioned earlier in this paper. The scores obtained by the four groups were compared with one another to see whether or not there were possible differences between groups in their listening comprehension test.

## 8. Results

### *The analysis of variance of participants' post-test scores in four groups*

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the mean scores gained by each group in the pre-test and post-test respectively. As is observed, the participants who listened to the culturally-oriented materials scored higher than the other three groups.

**Insert Table 1 right about here.**

**Insert Table 2 right about here.**

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) found the scores on the four groups in post-tests to be significantly different. Since the F-ratio is bigger than 1, we know that there is a meaningful difference among the means. In the same vein, to pinpoint the precise location of any statistically significant differences between four groups, the researcher calculated a dependent t-test. Additionally, post-hoc dependent t- tests indicated that, in regard to the effect of cultural background knowledge, the performance of all groups differed significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ). The differences between the mean scores of groups A and B ( $d = .73$ ) were lower than the differences between groups A and D ( $d = 4.3$ ). In the same line, the differences between the mean scores of A and B ( $d = .73$ ) appeared to be lower than B and D ( $d = 3.57$ ), and A and C ( $d = 1.36$ ) lower than C and D ( $d = 2.94$ ). On the other hand, the difference between the mean scores of groups B and C ( $d = .63$ ) was lower than that of groups B and D ( $d = 3.57$ ) and groups C and D ( $d = 2.94$ ). The results of One-Way ANOVA Test point out that the mean values of the treatment groups gained in the study are not the same.

**Insert Table 3 right about here.**

### *The results of group A (TC)*

Regarding group A performance, there was a significant difference between the participants' mean scores in the pretest and the posttest. In order to make sure that the difference in the mean scores was statistically significant, the statistical t-test was administered. For group A, the t-observed was calculated as 4.02 for a degree of freedom of 58 which was higher than the t-critical of 1.671. The results, therefore, confirmed that group A of the participants performed differently in the two tests. In other words, the difference between the mean scores of group A (TC) is statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ , t-value = 4.02). This shows that the participants in TC group performed better in the test and this better performance seems to be the result of their familiarity with the culturally-oriented materials which was fulfilled during the instruction period of the study. So the participants in group A could improve their listening comprehension

during the semester through having greater exposure to target culture texts as one kind of specific culturally-oriented language listening materials.

**Insert Table 4 right about here.**

According to the above mentioned information, as the critical value of group one (TC) was 1.671 indicating a significant difference between the observed T and the critical T, therefore, H01 emphasizing that texts with English and American culture orientation do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners was safely rejected.

*The results of group B (ITC)*

Regarding the performance of group two (ITC), there was a significant difference between the participants' mean scores in the pretest and the posttest. In order to make sure that the difference in the mean scores was statistically significant, the statistical t-test was administered. The t-observed was calculated as 3.30 for a degree of freedom of 58 which was higher than the t-critical of 1.671. The results, therefore, confirmed that group two (ITC) of the participants performed differently in the two tests. In other words, as table 5 indicates, the difference between the mean scores is statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ , t-value = 3.30). This shows that the participants in ITC group performed better than the other groups (SC and CF) in the test.

**Insert Table 5 right about here.**

*Results of group C (SC)*

Regarding group C (SC), there was a significant difference between mean scores in the pretest and the posttest. Again, since the t-observed (3.42) was higher than t-critical (1.67), it is confirmed that group C participants performed differently in the two tests. As table 6 indicates, the difference between the mean scores of participants in SC group is statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ , t-value = 3.42). This shows that the participants in group C could improve their listening comprehension during the semester through having exposure to source culture texts as one kind of specific culturally-oriented language listening materials.

**Insert Table 6 right about here.**

*The results of group D (CF)*

There was not any significant difference between the mean scores of group D in the pretest and the posttest. As shown in table 7, the t-observed was calculated as .55 which was less than the t-critical (1.671). The results, therefore, confirmed that group four participants performed nearly the same in the two tests ( $P < 0.01$ , t-value = .55). This shows that the participants in CF group failed to improve their listening comprehension during the semester through having exposure to culture free texts.

**Insert Table 7 right about here.**

Since t-critical (1.67) was lower than the t-observed in groups B (3.30), and C (3.42), the two hypotheses (H02 and H03) were rejected. But, as it is clear from the above tables, the t-critical (1.671) of group D was higher than the observed T (.55) in this group, so H04 proposing that culture-free texts do not have any significant influence on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners was not rejected.

In other words, the t-value revealed that the four groups performed differently on the posttest which was indicative of the fact that greater cultural familiarity with language listening materials promotes the Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension.

The results of the study, however, contradict that of Long (1990) in that she observed no significant difference between the familiar and unfamiliar passages for the recognition measure, though the English summaries revealed a higher proportion of correct units for the familiar topic. At the same time, the results of the study contradict the perceptual phase of Bacon's (1992) study in which she found little use of advance organizers during this phase.

## 9. Discussion

According to Sasaki, Yoshinori and Gakuin (1991), two general views exist in relation to culture and materiel designing in ELT. Advocates of the first view believe in teaching English without culture or culturally sterile teaching. Assigning no role to culture in teaching English as a second or foreign language, they reject the direct inclusion of culture in the school curriculum. In Iran, this idea has resulted in the expulsion of culture from the state-school curriculum on the grounds that:

- 1) Persian culture is a mixture of national and Islamic cultures. National culture is based on old customs and traditions which people follow during the history and Islamic culture is originated from religious beliefs and rules which people try to obey in their every day life.
- 2) The dominant western culture will be a threat to our local culture.

- 3) Teaching western culture may result in cultural conflict.
- 4) If you teach and emphasize English culture in EFL classes, you may be labeled negatively as a western-oriented or politically-motivated teacher.

On the other hand, supporters of the second view believe in the inclusion of culture in the curriculum, because they believe language and culture are not separable and all language is interpreted in relation to the culture and, therefore, teaching language irrespective of culture is impossible. They believe that language and culture are so interwoven that focusing on one irrespective of the other is very difficult if not impossible. This very notion was somehow approved in the present study. That is, the results indicated that cultural familiarization of the text has a significant effect on listening comprehension. Listeners are expected to achieve the writer's intended meaning by combining existing information with what they listen (Bacon, 1992; Chastain, 1988; Chiang & Dunkel, 1992; Long, 1990; Markham & Latham, 1987; Mueller, 1980; Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994).

The familiarization of the terms related to the customs and traditions in the short-term memory contributed to schema activation of the listeners (Alptekin 1981; Schank & Abelson, 1977). The listeners who listen to the culturally-oriented texts also did not have to deal with unfamiliar terms in it and this resulted in better comprehension since they could process new input in their short-term memory.

According to Anderson and Lynch (2000), successful comprehension in listening takes place when the listener has schematic knowledge, knowledge of the context and systemic knowledge. In the treatment lessons, the participants had the opportunity to deal with key vocabulary items that were presented in the same context as they would hear in the text. This is consistent with previous studies (Caplan-Carbin, 1997; Ervin, 1992; Gatbonton & Segalowits, 1988; Sadighi & Zare 2002; Schmidt & Rinehart, 1994; William & Thomas, 1991).

Providing the learners with background knowledge as well as systemic knowledge as advocated by Anderson and Lynch (2000) provides learners with the necessary information to facilitate comprehension of an unfamiliar topic. The reason behind this might be that building background knowledge and topic familiarity about the cultural context of listening texts could lead the participants in groups A, B and C to improve their listening comprehension to a significant extent during this study.

Moreover, the results of the present study challenges and rejects Chambers' view (1997) that comprehension as a crucial component of aural proficiency is acquired and emerges naturally and cannot be improved through practice or exposure to language listening materials such as those of culturally-oriented listening texts. According to Chambers, the automatic promotion of listening comprehension develops naturally during any language learning situation. In other words, Chambers emphasizes the point that other language skills and sub-skills can be improved through practice and exposure except listening comprehension.

Based on the results obtained, it seems that the Iranian EFL course books do not adequately prepare students for an intercultural communication due to the fact that they focus excessively on language forms, lack diverse social issues, and do not promote students' awareness of the target language culture. If culture and language are inseparable, then we need to try to teach culture in some kind of systematic way as we try to do with other aspects of language such as grammar and vocabulary. The results indicate that the Iranian EFL course books do not prepare students to cope with the international society. Additionally, the aim of foreign language teaching does not seem to develop the basic competence for mutual communication, using and understanding every day English due to the fact that, in Iran, teaching methods are not directed, as it should be, toward the target language culture.

### 10. Pedagogical implications

Having background knowledge is a key feature of any kinds of listening materials, so language learners wanting to improve their listening comprehension should have greater exposure to two kinds of listening materials: target culture materials and international target culture materials. Through having greater exposure to specific culturally-oriented materials, for example, English culture materials, language learners can improve their listening comprehension.

Background knowledge, cultural familiarity and linguistic complexity are essential linguistic and meta-linguistic features for the enhancement of listening comprehension. Accordingly, having exposure to language materials in which these three features are highly observed can boost listening comprehension development.

Vocabulary recycling is another feature regarding developing any listening materials which is generally supposed to help language learners build up their lexicon over time. Moreover, according to Abu Rabia (1998), language learners can acquire the knowledge, structures, strategies, and vocabulary items they can use in everyday situations through having exposure to culturally-oriented materials. The vocabulary items used in culturally oriented texts are basic to the type of conversations that language learners are likely to encounter in a social situation.

### 11. Limitations of the study

This study endeavored to manifest the effect of cultural familiarity on promoting pre- intermediate language learners' listening comprehension skill. Similar to other studies, this research has its own particular limitations In order to make

the research move manageably, some limitations were made. In so doing, age and gender were not considered as the intervening variables in the study. Moreover, the second limitation is related to the fact that the participants of the present study were coming from one particular area of the country. Different language teachers throughout the country may have their own methodology in language teaching and consequently language learners may receive relatively different instructions. Therefore, it seems reasonable to deduce that a big nationwide research project is needed to confirm the results of such a study.

## 12. Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this paper, culture and language are inexorably linked and as such cannot be separated. Numerous authors (Byram 1997; Harumi, 2002; Kramsch 1993) have highlighted the impossibility of teaching English without teaching culture. Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) emphasizing the necessity of teaching culture for EFL learners propose that if it were not English but any other language in the world, then it would be possible to teach the culture with the language; but that is not the same for English as it is a global language. The language of Bulgaria belongs to Bulgarian, the language of Dutch belongs to the Netherlands; but the language of English does not belong to Britain any more. Whether culture is consciously or unconsciously part of the teachers' pedagogic aims, the transmission of culture is unavoidable. The content of what we teach will always be in some way linked to culture, as Tseng (2002) points out "every lesson is about something and that something is culture" (p.20).

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Table1. Mean scores gained by treatment groups in the pre-tests

condition	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
TC	11.56	30	1.57
ITC	10.6	30	1.76
SC	10.1	30	1.72
CF	10.13	30	1.72
<b>TOTAL</b>	42.39	120	6.77

Table 2. Mean scores gained by treatment groups in the post-tests

condition	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
TC	14.46	30	1.52
ITC	13.73	30	1.82
SC	13.1	30	1.72
CF	10.16	30	1.71
<b>TOTAL</b>	51.45	120	6.77

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA Test Results

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Post-Test score	Between Groups	319.41	3	106.47	11.92	9.24
	Within Groups	1035.98	116	8.9308		
	Total	1373.39	119			

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics of the pretest and the posttest of group A*

<i>tests</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>t-test</b>
Pretest	30	11.56	1.57	4.02
<b>Posttest</b>	30	14.46	1.52	

Table 5. *Descriptive statistics of the pretest and the posttest of group B*

<i>tests</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>t-test</b>
Pretest	30	10.60	1.76	3.30
<b>Posttest</b>	30	13.73	1.82	

Table 6. *Descriptive statistics of the pretest and the posttest of group C*

<i>tests</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>t-test</b>
Pretest	30	10.10	1.72	3.42
<b>Posttest</b>	30	13.10	1.72	

Table 7. *Descriptive statistics of the pretest and the posttest of group D*

<i>tests</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>t-test</b>
Pretest	30	10.13	1.72	.55
<b>Posttest</b>	30	10.16	1.71	



## Chinese EFL Students' Perspectives on the Integration of Technology

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### Abstract

This study explores the centrality of the technology integration to Chinese EFL students' experiences in College English instruction. Students involved in this qualitative and quantitative study described the effectiveness of Web-based instructional environments (WBIEs) facilitated by the WebNing course management systems. Sources that were used for data analysis include online survey and oral interviews. The study demonstrates that students perceive the advantages of using Web-based instruction (WBI). They feel that the WBI greatly enhances their experiences by (1) developing their writing skills through online essay, (2) improving their communication skills through online discussion and (3) providing greater learner autonomy. Besides, Web-based learning empowers students to be actively involved in the learning process and to be responsible for their own learning. The findings of this study provide a useful reference point for those educators contemplating the implementation of a web-based instruction.

**Keywords:** College English instruction, Chinese EFL students, technology integration

### 1. Introduction

The integration of new technologies into foreign language curriculum has become a growing and significant component of foreign language instruction. Online course management system, especially asynchronous computer-mediated communication (e.g., e-mail, electronic bulletin boards), promotes interactive learning, which is central to the development of communicative language skills. In addition to providing opportunities for online activities, technology has become an integral part of learning and teaching. Previous studies have documented a number of benefits that students have gained by using Internet technology (e.g., Chun & Wade, 2003; Darhower, 2002; Lee, 2002a, 2004; Sengupta, 2001; Smith, 2003; Warschauer, 2000). Technology-enhanced instruction offers students unparalleled access to instructional resources, far surpassing the reach of the traditional classroom. It also makes possible learning experiences that are open, flexible, and distributed, providing opportunities for engaging interactive, and efficient instruction (Smith & Hardaker, 2000). Furthermore, cognitive-based theories of learning have extended the design and delivery of Web-based instruction, applying the technical nomenclature to instructional practices (Rovai, 2002).

As technology-enhanced instruction is new in China, whether it is effective as is often claimed is still largely unknown. Not much research has been conducted so far into the effectiveness of integrating technology in Chinese EFL instruction, probably because of its newness and its complexity. Therefore, this study serves as an initial examination of the empirical evidence for its instructional effectiveness. Systematic studies on how students perceive necessary conditions for online learning need to be carried out. By listening to the voices of students, teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their intended pedagogical efforts and further modify their strategies and instruction to meet their students' needs and interests.

The purpose of this study is to explore Chinese EFL students' perspectives on the effectiveness of using the WebNing course management system. The study presents findings on how students' roles, learning conditions, beliefs, and attitudes shape the understanding of WBI for foreign language acquisition. First, a theoretical framework for language learning will be discussed. Second, a design model, the participants in the project, and the technological tools and the

procedures used for online activities will be described. Then, the results of the study using online survey and final oral interviews will be reported and discussed along with suggestions for future improvement and research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a widely used educational tool because it lends itself to instruction based on sociocultural principles. It has been suggested by Vygotsky (1978) and explored by many researchers (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Coughlin & Duff, 1996; Warschauer, 2000) that learning takes place in a social environment and is facilitated by dialogue. During this exchange of ideas, each individual interlocutor is able to internalize the new jointly constructed knowledge. Learning is therefore mediated by the context in which it takes place, the tools used to aid the learning process, such as dialogue, electronic messages, and Web pages, as well as by the participants involved in the learning process. This collaborative learning process is often facilitated by scaffolding, when interlocutors provide explanations, questions, and suggestions to assist each other in solving the current problems (Donato, 1996). Collaborative learning tasks encourage learner autonomy, build teamwork, alter the role of teachers and students, allow students to scaffold, facilitate class discussion, and promote critical thinking (Henri & Rigault, 1996). When students scaffold each other, they can ultimately reach higher-level understandings of tasks or solve problems they would have been unable to solve alone. When done through writing instead of speaking, as is the case in CMC, the writing process changes from an independently performed task to one that promotes use of the input and reflection of other students.

Apart from the cognitive benefits described above, students and teachers alike have witnessed the positive social impact CMC can have. Asynchronous electronic exchanges seem to foster the building of a learning community, where participants offer each other support and praise (Cole, Raffier, Rogan, & Schleicher, 1998; McKenzie & Murphy, 2000; Sengupta, 2001). The body of findings illustrates how "CMC creates the opportunity for a group of people to construct knowledge together, thus linking reflection and interaction" (Warschauer, 1997, p. 473). Therefore, it seems to be a good fit for promoting the type of student-centered learning that is central to the sociocultural theory of language learning.

Within this theoretical framework, the purpose of the project described below is to advance research that examines technology-enhanced instruction from students' perspectives. The multichannel Web tools of the WebNing allow teachers to create online activities which promote interaction and collaboration among students. This study investigates whether participation in a one-semester network-based course affects students' attitudes and beliefs toward the development of their English skills and the use of Internet technology.

## 3. The study

### 3.1 Participants

A total of 61 undergraduate non-English majors (one class) from a southern university of China participated in the present study in the second semester of the academic year 2007-2008. The students participating in the study are between the ages of 19 and 20, and in their freshman year of college. They are required to use the WebNing to support their English learning. In terms of computer access and literacy, the students can do their course work in the computer learning center or on their own computers, and they have used New Horizon College English online system on campus prior to the study. Therefore, most of the students are familiar with online system operation.

### 3.2 Description of the project

The project is part of a required curriculum of College English and is developed to help college students improve their English competency with the aid of Internet technology. The primary teaching methods involve face-to-face instruction (four hours per week) with the integration of a web-based component, which consists of the following sections: course information (syllabus, lecture notes), assignments, student page, group page, discussion forum, and blogs. Each section is represented by an icon on the front page of the course. For this project, the WebNing serves as two major instructional tools. One is the content tool which delivers course materials, and the other is the communication tool which allows all users to interact with each other in cyberspace using "Discussion Forum" and "Blogs" (for more information about WebNing, <http://onlineenglish2008.ning.com>). The main objectives of this project are (1) to ensure that all the students could interact with course materials outside lecture time (thus enabling them to become "e-students") and (2) to increase student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction in the Web-based instructional environments.

In the first week of class, the instructor informs students that they are required to use the WebNing to carry out a variety of online tasks in order to develop their English skills throughout the semester. Within the first two weeks of the course, the students are asked to use their e-mail account and password to login into the course, access the course materials, and use "Discussion Forum" and "Blogs" as part of their class participation credit. The online activities are scheduled in the course syllabus and are available online. To avoid the possibility of confusion and to make sure the students know where to go to complete online assignments, the instructor demonstrates to the students the major tools they will be using.

### 3.2.1 Online essay

Every week students are required to write an essay to answer the open-ended questions found in the 'writing' folder under the "Assignment". Open-ended questions are based on topics related to the text or daily life, such as environmental awareness or advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad. Posted online are a set of different topics, each with a dozen open-ended questions for essay writing (see sample essay questions in Appendix A). After completing the assignment, students send it to the "Blogs". All the students can respond to others' essays. The instructor then corrects the students' essays by writing comments and correcting mistakes on usage, vocabulary, and grammar. For instance, the instructor underlines each error and writes the code for the correction, such as "vt" for verb tense, "voc" for wrong word, and "prep" for incorrect preposition. The assignments are then returned to the students through the "Blogs". The students retrieve the documents and then respond to the instructor's feedback and correct the errors. Finally, they download the revised copy and place it in their "Page" as part of the course requirement.

### 3.2.2 Online Discussion

In addition to online essay writing, students are also required to post their opinions and responses to the discussion topics, and discussion assignments are posted every two weeks. The instructor uses the asynchronous forum board to engage the students in online discussion activity outside lecture time. The aim of online discussion is to allow students to freely express through informal social interaction their opinions and exchange ideas on the assigned topics (see sample online discussion questions in Appendix B). Discussions are based on such topics as the role of men and women in modern society or young adulthood. The instructor divides the class into small groups. Students first read the topic-based questions posted in the 'discussion' folder under the "Assignment" and then log into the "Group Page" for discussion. To enhance the discussion, instructions and the rules are developed by the instructor and posted to the students (see Figure 1). According to a study by Beaudin (1999), providing guidelines for online activity should be rated as an important criterion for keeping online discussion "on-topic". Discussion forum can replace the casual conversations that take place between students and have a permanent written log. As Clark (2001) points out "students have ample time to read other students' comments, do research and formulate a detailed response". Several threads are set up in the forum board. Students are aware that there is a regular moderating presence, and the instructor regularly accesses the discussion forums, posts comments and answers questions.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Online survey results

In order to know about students' general attitudes toward the WBI, within two weeks of the completion of the project described above, all the students taking the WBI are required to finish a questionnaire and short-answer questions, which are posted in the WebNing as a survey.

The questionnaire contains 18 statements with which students are asked to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. These statements elicited information about students' perspectives in four categories: 1) the usefulness of WBIEs, 2) the effect of WBI on learning subject matter and skills, 3) the effect of WBI on students' interest, and 4) the effect of WBI on students' confidence as learners, technical skills, and performance on course assessments.

The data of the questionnaire are reported in percentages of students' response for each statement, as shown in Appendix C. The statements are ordered from those receiving the highest number to the lowest number of responses expressing agreement.

#### 4.1.1 Perspectives on Web-based instructional environments

The WebNing creates an active and supportive instructional environment in which students interact socially with each other as they expand their use of English beyond the classroom. Most of the students (81.3%) praise the unique learning community created by the WebNing, and they say they enjoy using WBIEs. Over 60% reports that they have more interaction and communication with the instructor, as well as with their classmates. They acknowledge that the WebNing make communication very efficient and effective because they are able to receive responses very quickly from their classmates and constructive feedback from the instructor. More than half (58.3%) feel free to ask questions. Being able to work and share opinions with others is a valuable concomitant benefit of online exchanges.

When asked if the WebNing is used comfortably, 67.6% of the students admits that they are comfortable using it. This finding supports the work of Salmon (2000) who finds that students need to feel competent about how to use WBIEs before they are comfortable with exchanging ideas and information.

#### 4.1.2 Perspectives concerning the effect on learning

After a semester-long experience with the WBI, more than 69.6% of the students feel that they have learned more language skills than they would have learned in a regular class. 60% of the students state that their writing skills have improved because of online writing activity. In addition, a slight majority of students (52.2%) find writing topic-based online essays is enjoyable and profitable.

The asynchronous discussions are the most innovative aspects of the developments presented in this project. Regarding the online short-answer question survey, a basic summary of their comments about online discussion are overwhelmingly positive toward the use of the communications tools and this is also enforced through students' voluntary participation in the online discussion activity (see Figure 2). It is important to accept the adoption of specific on-line learning styles because it will have an influence on the outcomes of their learning in the future.

The online questionnaire results show that half students (50%) feel that they have learned a considerable amount from the online discussion activity. Linguistically, students feel that the process of composing ideas allows them to recycle the vocabulary and structures they have previously learned as they read and respond to their classmates. Cognitively, they feel that they are challenged by their limited linguistic skills and that they have to stop and think about what they can say and need to say in order to get the ideas across to their partners.

Lastly, only 27.9% of the students believe that working with their classmates has contributed significantly to the development of their communicative skills. Conrade (1999) finds that when compared to fourth semester students, first semester language students give low priority value to communicative skills. Therefore, since the students in this project are first semester students for WBI, this may explain this finding.

#### 4.1.3 Enjoyment and interest

According to the questionnaire results, the most majority of the students (73.2 %) agree that the WebNing makes the course more interesting, and two-thirds (65.9%) says that if given a choice between a regular English class and a WBI, they will take the latter. In addition, more than half of the students (53.45) report that they enjoy doing the online assignments better than traditional assignment.

Interestingly, these findings coincide with the online written feedback that the majority of the students speak favorably about the WBI (see Figure 3), describing it with 52 positive adjectives, compared to 3 negative ones. Among positive adjectives, the most common are "interesting / interested" and "good". Students attribute to 56 strengths to the project, while listing only 16 weaknesses.

In the questionnaire, when asked if Web-based learning can take the place of live lectures, 66% of the students state that they find the online learning experience worthwhile but not as a replacement / alternative to face-to-face contact, but rather as supplementary learning method. More positive results may have emerged if the word "alternative" had been omitted, possibly replacing it with "additional". This emphasizes the need to establish the rationale for using a Web-based instruction to the students with the notion that the aim is to supplement and enhance their learning and is not to replace face-to-face interaction.

#### 4.1.4 Perspectives concerning effect on confidence as a learner, technical skills and class assessments

For a clear majority of students, WBI appear to have had certain benefits. 79% of the students report that they have gained confidence in their ability to complete the online activities. A majority (54.4%) also believe that they have gained confidence in their ability to use technology successfully. These findings corroborate research showing that using WBI makes students gain confidence in language use as well as in the use of the computer (Beauvois, 1994; Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Lunde, 1990).

In addition, almost two-third (64.8%) expresses a gain in confidence as independent learners. This finding has supported results from the Blackstock study (1993) which concludes that students engaged in technological interactive learning environments become independent "knowledge navigators". These beginning students successfully and independently negotiate the linguistically complex Internet and interactive environment.

As for class assessment, only 40.8% of the students state that their WBI experiences help them improve their scores. Nowaczyk (1998) finds that students attribute learning value primarily to those multimedia components that directly related to course examinations, regardless of the intrinsic learning value of the material. Warschauer (1996) also finds that the degree to which computer-based projects are integrated into general course goals and structure correlated to differences in student motivation. The less enthusiastic perspectives concerning the general experiences in the WBI may be due to the fact that there was no direct link between individual electronic components and classroom assessments and structure.

#### 4.2 Oral interview results

In addition to the online survey, an oral interview is given to the students at the end of semester. During the interview, students are asked to describe their experiences with online activities and to explain the most valuable, interesting and difficult aspects of the WBI. All the interviews are recorded for the data analysis. Analysis of the qualitative data from oral interviews reveals that the majority of students regard the Web-based learning as having a very beneficial impact on their language development. However, they make some suggestions for future improvements. The following discussion highlights important issues that students express regarding the WBI for English learning.

#### 4.2.1 Development of writing skills through online essay writing

The goal of online essay writing is to build proficiency through describing, narrating, explaining situations, and expressing opinions in different contexts. After the one-semester writing practice, the majority of the students feel that their writing skills have improved. The following comments made during the interviews reveal students' rewarding experiences with online essay writing:

- ◆ Now I am more confident with my writing through writing so much in the WebNing.
- ◆ As for writing, I don't feel like I have a big problem, and I think I have lots of ideas on everything, which helps me a lot to write. But then looking at other people's ideas, I think mine is too narrow. Other people's perspective broadens my mind, and I think I really see things more in-depth and widely.
- ◆ At the beginning, I have some problems with the grammar and vocabulary. I spend a lot of time looking for words in the dictionary. I feel that I write better now and I'm able to express my opinions easily.

Students agree that at the beginning of the semester per week writing involves a lot of work. By the end of the semester, many of them are proud of how much and how easily they can write. One student during the interview recalls her change of attitude towards the writing requirement, commenting:

- ◆ At the beginning I am skeptical about using the WebNing for writing assignments. But after a few weeks, I get used to it and find the online writing very rewarding. The topics are very interesting to me. I have never written so many essays in English. I believe my writing skills have improved.

Regarding the topics for online essays, students find open-ended questions stimulating and meaningful because they are able to express their voices through their own life experiences. A few students, however, experience difficulty in being able to fully express meaning in the target language. One linguistically weak student admits during the interview that:

- ◆ The topics are too difficult to me. I feel frustrated not being able to express myself in English. The writing process is overwhelming for me. It takes too much of my time writing essays. I often end up translating my ideas from Chinese to English. I think I need a lot of help.

This student further suggests that the instructor should provide students with more guidance on how to write English essays.

#### 4.2.2 Enhancement of communication skills through online discussion

According to Lamy and Goodfellow (1999), a task that simply requires social conversation may not stretch learners' ability with language production. Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun (1993) emphasize that tasks without a specified goal may not push learners to use their linguistic resources for negotiation of meaning. The goal of online discussion is to engage students in sharing, exchanging, and debating information relevant to their life experiences. Participating in this form of social and text-based interaction is a modern enactment of Vygotsky's idea of learning as a social-cultural process where language is an essential vehicle for development. WBIEs not only encourage students to use English but also reinforce their thinking skills and communication strategies, which are crucial for successful online interaction. Students praise the opportunity to use the target language in a natural way and feel that their communication skills in English have improved after participating in the online discussion. Students make the following comments during the interview:

- ◆ I like online discussion because we can share our ideas. It is necessary to think in English more rapidly than when you write the homework. This is more like the real world.
- ◆ Through online communication, I realize that I need to enlarge my English vocabulary because on many occasions I do not know how to say certain words and I have to look them up in the dictionary. I find it very interesting to learn English by using English.

Online discussion is perhaps a less intimidating environment than the classroom, and encourages shy students to express their ideas without feelings of embarrassment. There are no anonymous postings to ensure that every student participates, but these alternative methods provide a range of opportunities to encourage those students who might not necessarily contribute face-to-face. It is important to provide a range of learning opportunities to try to engage all students. Online discussions perhaps provide an approach to engage those students who prefer not to ask questions in the classroom, in front of their classmates and the instructor. One student during the interview expressed her feeling of ease while being online:

- ◆ I hate speaking in front of people, but I feel comfortable chatting with my classmates online. Although I am very slow in composing my ideas, I do not feel nervous in the virtual learning environment. Now I'm more comfortable expressing myself in English. The WebNing is very helpful and valuable for me. It motivates me to speak more in class.

WBIEs offer a great affective support to the shy students so they can carry out the shared task without feeling pressure as intensively as they do in front of the class. In other words, WBIEs built up students' confidence and encourage those who are reluctant to participate in oral discussions to speak up in class (e.g., Chapelle, Compton, Kon, & Sauro, 2004; Lee,

2002a). Furthermore, Sweeney (2001) demonstrates that Asian students with weaker English-language skills have a more positive evaluation of bulletin board discussion as they offer more space for them to prepare their opinion and responses.

#### 4.2.3 Improvement of learner autonomy

All of the participating students feel that the experience is very interesting and rewarding. Although they have prior experience using computers for learning and communication, it is the first time they use computers for discussing and writing in English and they find it exciting. As one of the students exclaims, "English suddenly becomes familiar and close to me. This is so different from high school English classes!" They like it because one of the major functions of the WebNing is supported by the content tool by which course materials are organized and presented in a logical manner in a single shared space. The results of the study show that easy access to all materials and tools facilitate the learning process. Most of the students quickly adapt to doing and checking their homework online. More importantly, they learned how to organize their work by retrieving documents from the "Blogs" and placing them into their "Page". The following comments from the final oral interviews demonstrate just how the students feel that the use of the WebNing have enhanced their organizational skills and motivated them to become independent and self-directed learners:

♦ Frankly speaking, I'm not a very organized person. After sending and receiving so many essay assignments from the "Blogs", I couldn't find them to make revisions. In order not to get lost, I learn to place everything in the order. The WebNing makes me organize things better.

♦ I think it's easy to get lost if you don't know where things are. As we have to do so many things through the WebNing, I have to learn how to organize them in a logical manner.

A few students, however, remark that it is confusing and easy to get lost at the beginning because of the abundant information presented in WebNing. Each document the students send to the instructor's "Blogs" shows the time and the date of that document. Several students have difficulty keeping up with their work and complain about the amount of work required for this course. These students often do their homework at the last minute for the online discussions. One student admits that he has learned to organize his work by making plans and not falling behind in the course schedule. This student further gives explanation that the WebNing has forced him to be efficient and self-disciplined. These comments imply that learners' self-sufficiency and independency play a crucial role in Web-based instruction. In other words, students need to learn to be in charge of their own learning and become actively involved in the learning process as previous studies have shown (e.g., Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999; Lee, 2002a).

### 5. Conclusion

This study has illustrated the experiences and perspectives of one group of Chinese EFL students about the integration of technology into English language classroom instruction. While a one-semester investigation is limited in scope and depth, the project has succeeded in making many students understand what is required to be successful when using the WBI. The use of the WebNing as an instructional tool has facilitated the development of students' language skills, reinforced their cognitive skills, and supported an active learning environment. Students have benefited from online discussion and writing practice. The findings show that they are content with and motivated by the well structured online tasks and that they expand the use of the target language to enlarge their knowledge beyond the classroom setting. Besides, this study also reveals that online-based learning empowers students to be actively involved in the learning process and to be responsible for their own learning. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that WBIEs facilitate the interaction between the students and the teacher as the latter has systematically guided, assisted, and provided constructive feedback to the students.

There are several limitations to this study, including the fact that student information is self-reported and self-assessed. In addition, the duration of this study is relatively short. Finally, this study focuses on a small population, and therefore, data may not be generalized to other foreign language classrooms. Nevertheless, since little research is available on Chinese student perspectives on English language learning in Web-based environments, this study may provide insights to universities currently implementing the implementation of WBI.

More empirical studies should be conducted to examine students' perspectives on the synchronous interaction via discussion boards in the WBIEs. In addition, studies should be conducted concerning the role of the teacher in the WBIEs, in order to identify those teacher behaviors and interactions most favorable to students' second language acquisition. Finally, further studies that include native-speaker online exchanges using Web-based instruction will advance the knowledge of how students perceive the role of interaction in a socially collaborative context. Such studies may contribute to a future knowledge base that will shape and improve curriculum and instruction mediated by technology.

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### Appendix A: Sample Questions for Online Essays

#### Week 2:

After finishing Unit 2, you may have more knowledge of the environmental problems. 1) Could you tell us which issue concerns you and rank them in order of importance: a) river and sea pollution; b) Antarctica; c) destruction of the ozone layer; d) whaling; e) pollution from cars; f) nuclear power; g) nuclear waste; h) acid rain; i) the greenhouse effect. 2) Are you satisfied with the government's performance on environmental matters? 4) Have you noticed deterioration in your local environment in the last ten years? 5) Please tell us about other environment anxieties which may be concerning you.

#### Week 4:

If you are given a chance to study abroad, where do you want to study? Why? What do you want to study? Why? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad? Do you think our government should encourage Chinese to study abroad.

### Appendix B: Sample Questions for Online Discussion

#### Topic 1: An ideal youth

What is an ideal youth for you? Exchange ideas with your classmates. Do you think young people nowadays have too much responsibility and little freedom? Explain your reasons.

#### Topic 2: The role of women and men in today's society

What are the roles of women and men in today's society? Do women have the same rights as men? Explain your reasons.

### Appendix C: Summary of the Questionnaire

Table 1. Perspectives on Web-based Instructional Environments (WBIEs)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Response
	%	%	%	%	%
5. I think WBIEs were useful to English learning	5.6	13.1	52.8	28.5	0.0
11. I felt comfortable in the WBIEs	7.3	22.9	49.2	18.4	2.2
18. I had more interaction and communication with the instructor in the WBIEs	16.8	19.6	45	18.4	0.3
9. I had more interaction and communication with my classmates in the WBIEs	14.0	25.4	48.3	11.7	0.6
14. I felt free to ask questions in the WBIEs	14.8	26.4	43	15.3	0.6

Table 2. Perspectives Concerning the Effect on Learning

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Response
	%	%	%	%	%
4. I learned more English language skills than I would have learned in a regular English class	6.4	20.7	33.2	36.3	1.4
12. I believe online essays have improved my writing skills.	13.4	25.8	40.2	19.8	0.8
15. I enjoyed writing topic-based online essays	16.2	31.3	39.9	12.3	0.3
17. I think online discussion has enhanced my communicative skills	13.4	35.8	40.2	9.8	0.8
8. Working with someone online was beneficial to me	26.8	42.5	21.8	6.1	2.8

Table 3. Perspectives on Interest and Relevance

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Response
	%	%	%	%	%
1. The Web-based learning experiences made this a more interesting course	8.7	17.6	52	21.2	0.0
3. If given a choice between a regular English class and a WBI, I would take the latter	10.6	23.5	50.3	15.6	0.6
10. I enjoyed doing the online assignments better than traditional assignment	20.1	24.3	39.7	13.7	2.2
7. The tasks I performed on the Web were interesting	22.1	27.1	43.9	6.7	0.3
6. I found learning in a Web-based instructional environment a worthwhile experience as an alternative to face-to-face lecture	22.1	43.9	28.8	4.2	1.1

Table 4. Perspectives Concerning Effect on Confidence as a Learner, Technical Skills and Class Assessments

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Response
	%	%	%	%	%
2. I was confident about completing assignments through the Web	4.5	16.5	63.4	15.6	0.0
13. I have become a better problem-solver after using the computer while learning English	6.1	28.2	52.8	12	0.8
16. I gained confidence in my ability to use technology successfully	14.8	29.6	44.1	10.3	1.1
6. I was confident to get a good grade in the course	22.1	34.4	32.7	8.1	2.8

Table 5. Rules for Online Discussion

1	Do not be afraid of posting the wrong answer—this is a discussion, not a test.
2	All messages must be relevant to the topic discussion.
3	All the students must participate— i.e. lurking is not allowed.
4	Before posting make sure that your messages are concise, and grammatically correct.
5	All dialogue is archived for you to return to for reflection at a later time.
6	Each group should nominate a group leader and only that member of the group should be logged in.

Table 6. Question: What do you think of online discussion?

Positive Comments	Negative Comments
We would not have discussions like this in the regular class	I find it difficult to get my message across without speaking face-to-face
Interesting and good fun	Big group can be confusing
Other students' views are important and they give you more ideas and can broaden your vision	Time consuming. I need face-to-face for communication
Good and remarkably fast discussion	It will be better with a small group
Fun and a good learning experience Let's have more of these activities	
You certainly learn from it.	

Table 7. Question: What do you think of this project?

<b>A. Adjectives</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>B. Likes</b>	<b>Number</b>
Interesting / Interested	15	Using computers	10
Good / Nice	10	Group discussion	9
Boring	3	E-mail	9
Enjoyable, liked	5	Essay writing	8
Exciting	4	Cooperative learning	4
Fresh / new	4		
Exciting / wonderful / great	6	<b>C. Dislikes</b>	
Useful	2	Didn't like group discussion	4
Encouraging	3	Didn't like learning by computer	4
meaningful	3	Didn't like essay writing	3
<b>D. Strengths</b>		<b>E. Weaknesses</b>	
Improved English	16	Not enough test-related skills	5
Improved writing	11	Too time consuming	4
Improved grammar	6	A lot of work	3
Improved communication	6	Students lack computer skills	3
A good learning experience	5	Many new vocabulary	1
Improved confidence	3		
Improved computer skills	3		
Improved typing skills	3		
Learned from others	3		



## A Close Look at the Relationship between Multiple Choice Vocabulary Test and Integrative Cloze Test of Lexical Words in Iranian Context

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### Abstract

In spite of various definitions provided for it, language proficiency has been always a difficult concept to define and realize. However the commonality of all the definitions for this illusive concept is that language tests should seek to test the learners' ability to use real-life language. The best type of test to show such ability is considered to be the integrative test and cloze test is in turn regarded to constitute nearly all the factors needed for language use ability. However, the greatest obstacle of cloze tests or in general pragmatic tests is their administrative and scoring constraints for a large number of testees. Discrete-point tests, as the easiest and most common type of tests used for valid national and international proficiency tests, have always been doubtfully questioned as to whether they indicate the learners' ability to use language in real-life situation, but due to their tangible shortcomings, no absolute answer can be provided. The study aims at shedding light at the idea of the extent to which the discrete items of vocabulary proficiency show the learners' vocabulary proficiency in the real world of language use. Hence, the study seeks to calculate the correlation between discrete-point and integrative language proficiency tests of vocabulary administered to 21 Iranian freshmen studying English as a Foreign Language.

**Keywords:** Proficiency, Discrete-point test, Multiple-choice test, Integrative test, Cloze test, Correlation, Expectancy grammar, Variance, Validity, Communicative competence

### 1. Introduction

Language proficiency is one of the most poorly defined concepts in the field of language testing, and proficiency tests have always been a point of inquiry in language testing during the past decades. However, what all testing specialists unanimously agree upon is the ability of language use required of the learners. Brière (1972) points out that the parameters of language proficiency are not easy to identify. Acknowledging the complexities involved in the concept of language proficiency, Brière states that the term proficiency may be defined as: the degree of competence or the capability in a given language demonstrated by an individual at a given point in time independent of a specific textbook, chapter in the book, or pedagogical method.

Farhady (1982) objects the idea by pointing out the ambiguities of Brière's definition and maintains that such a complicated definition could very well result in vague hypotheses about language proficiency and language proficiency tests. They could be vague with respect to unspecified terms such as competence, capability, demonstrated, and individual. The term competence could refer to linguistic, socio-cultural, or other types of competence. The term capability could refer to the ability of the learner to recognize, comprehend, or produce language elements (or a combination of them). Demonstration of knowledge could be in either written or the oral mode. Finally, the expression individual could refer to a language learner as listener, speaker, or both. These concepts should be clarified and their characteristics should be identified in order to develop explicit hypotheses.

Clark (1972) Concerning language proficiency as the language learner's ability Clark (1972) states that to use language for real-life purposes without regard to the manner in which that competence was acquired. Thus, in proficiency testing, the frame of reference . . . shifts from the classroom to the actual situation in which the language is used.

Apart from its different definitions provided by prominent activists of the field, proper administration of proficiency tests to assess skills required of the testees has also been a matter of concern. To do the assessment two different approaches to testing the learners' skills have been proposed: discrete-point tests and integrative tests. Discrete-point tests have been criticized for their low reliability and validity. However integrative tests (e.g. cloze tests) have their own special problems. The biggest of all is the limitations of administration and scoring for a large group of testees. So as a doubtful solution to the problem of massive assessment of the learners' language proficiency to handle the real-life use

of language, in this study, discrete-point tests are selected both to facilitate the administration problems of integrative tests and to show the extent to which they are correlated with them.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Language and Teaching Testing

Language testing is one of the major areas in applied linguistics. It is an integral part of the instrumental program and plays an important role in education. If we assume that the purpose of a test is to ascertain whether or to what extent the learner knows the language, obviously, fundamental to the preparation of valid tests of language proficiency will be a theoretical question of what it means to know a language. Corder (1975) states that our ability to do a good job of measuring the learner's knowledge of the language depends upon the learner's knowledge of the language depends on upon the adequacy of our theory about the language, our understanding of what is meant by knowledge of language.

Surely, to know a language does not mean knowing something about the language, and any method of teaching based on this assumption will fail to meet this discussion. Prior to the emergence of the communicative approach to language teaching, two theoretical approaches attempted to find appropriate answers to this question. One is the habit-skill approach that views language behavior as a chain of habit units, and other one is the rule-governed grammar approach that views language competence as the ability to generate novel utterances on the basis of a finite set of rules.

Thus the first approach assumes that knowing a language is a kind of habit-formation through conditioning and drill. For the holders of this view, language is either mimicry or analogy, and grammatical rules are merely descriptions of what is called habits. As Diller (1978) states, for them the human being is essentially a machine with a collection of habits which have been molded by outside world.

The second approach assumes that to know a language is to be able to create new sentences. Unlike the first group, proponents of this approach do not refuse to talk of mind, for this approach do not refuse to talk of mind, for them the mind has a creative role in learning a language. Relying on cognitive theory, those who hold this view believe that it is impossible to know a language without thinking in it.

Both of these approaches study a language as an abstract form apart from its important characteristic as a means of communication.

With the emergence of the communicative approach in language teaching, it was assumed that to know a language, in addition to the ability to manipulate linguistic structures, a foreign language learner must also acquire knowledge of the rules and conventions governing their use for communication.

The communicative teaching movement has made clear developments in language teaching, and the communicative needs of the general language learners are favored by most course designer, syllabus writers and English teachers. In recent years, a need has arisen to specify the aims of language learning more precisely, and teaching of ESP rather than general English is favored by most of the English Learners throughout the world.

Cheng (2004) maintains that beliefs about testing to follow beliefs about teaching and learning. Early theories of test performance, influenced by structuralist linguistics, saw knowledge of language as consisting of mastery of the features of the language as a system. This position was clearly articulated by Robert Lado in his book *Language Testing*, published in 1961. Testing focused on candidates' knowledge of grammatical system, of vocabulary, and of aspects of pronunciation. There was a tendency to atomize and decontextualize the knowledge to be tested, and to test aspects of knowledge in isolation. Thus, tests of grammar would be separate from tests of vocabulary. Material to be tested was presented with minimal context, for example in an isolated sentence. According to McNamara (2000) this practice of testing separate, individual points of knowledge, known as discrete point testing was reinforced by theory and practice within psychometrics, the emerging science of measurement of cognitive abilities.

Within a decade, the necessity of assessing the practical language skills of foreign students wishing to study at universities together with the need within the communicative movement in teaching for tests which measured productive capacities for language, led to a demand for language tests involved an integrated performance on the part of the language user. The discrete point tradition of testing was seen as focusing too exclusively on knowledge formal linguistic system for its own sake rather than on the way such knowledge is used to achieve communication. The new orientation resulted in the development of tests which integrated knowledge of relevant systematic features of language with an understanding of context. As a result, a distinction was drawn between discrete point tests and integrative tests such as speaking in oral interviews, the composing of whole written texts, and tests involving comprehension of extended discourse. The problem was that such integrative tests tended to score, requiring trained raters; and in any case were potentially unreliable.

Research carried out by Oller, in the 1970s seemed to offer a solution. Oller (1973) offered a new view of language and language use underpinning tests, focusing less on knowledge of language and more on the psycholinguistic processing involved in language use. He suggested Pragmatic tests involving two factors: the online processing of language in real

time, and mapping of linguistic with extralinguistic factors. Further he proposed what came to be known as the Unitary competence Hypothesis, that is, that performance on a whole range of tests depended on the same underlying capacity in the learner-the ability to integrate grammatical, lexical, contextual, and pragmatic knowledge in test performance. He argued that certain kinds of more efficient tests, particularly the cloze test measured the same kinds of skills as those tested in productive tests. It was argued that of a cloze test was an appropriate substitute for a test of productive skills because it required readers to integrate grammatical, lexical, contextual, and pragmatic knowledge in order to be able to supply the missing words. But further work showed that cloze tests on the whole seemed mostly to be measuring the same kinds of things as discrete point tests of vocabulary, grammar.

Douglas (2004) believes that, historically, language testing trends and practices have followed the shifting sands of teaching methodology. For example, in the 1950s, an era of behaviorism and special attention to contrastive analysis, testing focused on specific language elements. In the 1970s and in 1980s, communicative theories of language brought with them a more integrative view of testing in which specialists claimed "the whole of the communicative event was considerably greater than the sum of its linguistic elements" (Clark, 1983, p. 432). Today, test designers are still challenged in their quest for more authentic, valid instruments that stimulate real world interaction.

## 2.2 Discrete-point and Integrative Testing

The historical perspective underscore two major approaches to language testing that were debated in the 1970s and early 1980s. These approaches still prevail today. Even if in mutated form: the choice between discrete –point and integrative testing methods. Discrete point tests are constructed on the assumptions that language can be broken down into its component parts and that those parts can be tested successfully. It was claimed that an overall language proficiency test, then, should sample all four skills and as many linguistic discrete points as possible.

Such an approach demanded a decontextualization that often confused the test-taker. So, as the profession emerged into an era of emphasizing communication. Authenticity, and context, new approaches were sought. Oller (1979) argued that language competence is a unified set of interacting abilities that cannot be tested separately. His claim was that communicative competence is so global and requires such interaction that it cannot be captured in additive tests of grammar, reading, vocabulary, and other discrete points of language.) Others (Cziko, 1982, and Savignon, 1982) soon followed in their support for integrative testing.

Proponents of integrative test methods soon centered their arguments on what became known as the unitary trait hypothesis, which suggested an indivisible view of language proficiency: that vocabulary, grammar, phonology, the four skills, and other discrete points of language could not be disentangled from each other in language performance. The unitary trait hypothesis contended that there is a general factor of language proficiency such that all the discrete points do not add up to that whole.

Others argued against the unitary trait position. Farhady (1982) found significant and widely varying differences in performance on an ESL proficiency test, depending on subjects' native country, major field of study, and graduate versus undergraduate status. Weir (1990) noted that integrative tests such as cloze only tell us about a candidate's linguistic competence. They do not tell us anything directly about a student's performance ability.

### 2.2.1 Multiple-choice Items as Discrete-point Tests

A number of books discuss the construction and administration of multiple-choice items. 'Language Testing' by Robert Lado (1961), Modern Language Testing: A Handbook by Rebecca Valette (1967), Testing English as a Second Language by David Harris (1969), Foreign Language Testing: Theory and Practice by John Clark (1972), Testing and Experimental Methods by J. P. B. Allen and Alan Davies (1977), Revision of Modern Language Testing by Valette (1977) are some of the important books which deal with the construction of discrete point tests.

Discrete point multiple-choice tests assess one skill at a time – listening, speaking, reading or writing. They assess only one aspect of the skill – i.e. productive versus receptive, oral versus visual, etc. They attempt to focus attention on one point of grammar at a time. Each test item is aimed at one element of a particular component of a grammar item. According to Lado (1961) within each skill, aspect and component, discrete items focus on precisely one and only one phoneme, morpheme, lexical item, grammatical rule or whatever the appropriate element may be. But some believe that the reliability of multiple-choice tests is a function of the number of responses per item. They found that reduction in the number of distractors tended to lower the test reliability. Spearman - Brown formula gave reasonable good predictions of the reduced reliability when distractors were eliminated at random. To do further investigation some started with four-response forms by systematically eliminating the least effective distractor. They found that in a test period of fixed time limit, a greater number of two response items would produce more reliable scores than a smaller number of three or four response items. According to language testing specialists the essential characteristics of the distractors of multiple-choice items is that they should be plausible to those who lack the knowledge or ability for which the item is testing. Hence a lot of care should be put into the selection of the distractors.

### 2.2.2 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between linguistic contexts and extralinguistic contexts. In this connection Oller (1979) states,

Pragmatics is about how people communicate information about facts and feelings to other people, or how they merely express themselves and their feelings through the use of language for no particular audience, except possibly an omniscient god. (p,19)

Oller (1979) adds that quite often we know much more than what we actually express in words. We also leave a lot of it unsaid and we depend on the receiver to fill in what is unsaid and interpret our message. In normal use of language, no matter what level of language or mode of processing we think of, it is always possible to predict partially what will come next in any given sequence of elements. The elements may be sounds, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or larger units of discourse. The mode of processing may be listening, speaking, reading, writing, or thinking, or some combination of these. In the meaningful use of language, some sort of pragmatic expectancy grammar must function in all cases. (p,25)

### 2.2.3 Expectancy Grammar

According to Oller (1976), the notion of an expectancy grammar characterizes the psychologically real system that governs the use of a language in an individual who knows that language. The characteristic of such an expectancy system helps in two ways: to explain why certain kinds of language tests apparently work as well as they do; and to device other effective testing procedures that take account of these salient characteristics of functional language proficiency.

A valid language test should press the learners' internalized expectancy system into action and must further challenge its limits of efficient functioning in order to discriminate among degrees of efficiency. A language test to be valid should meet the **pragmatic naturalness criteria**. A test is said to meet the pragmatic naturalness criteria when it invokes and challenges the efficiency of the learners' expectancy grammar by causing him to process temporal sequences in the language that can conform to normal contextual constraints and by requiring him to understand the systematic correspondences of linguistic and extralinguistic context.

### 2.2.4 Pragmatic Tests and Language Proficiency

According to Oller (1979) there are two aspects of language use: factive and emotive use, the first is applied to convey information about people, things, events, ideas and states of affairs and the second is used to convey our attitude about the factual information we want to convey.

Every time we use language, we use both the aspects of language. It is quite possible for people to agree on the factual information conveyed but differ on the attitude towards those facts. There are two major contexts of language use: first the linguistic context which refers to the verbal and gestural contexts of language; and second the extralinguistic context which refers to the states of affairs constituted by things, events, people, ideas, relationships, feelings, perceptions, memories and so forth. The objective aspect of linguistic context, the world of existing things, may be distinguished from the subjective aspect of extralinguistic context, the world of self-concept and inter-personal relationships. There are systematic correspondences between linguistic and extralinguistic contexts. Linguistic contexts are pragmatically mapped onto extralinguistic contexts, and vice versa.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Question and Research Hypotheses

This study is aimed at answering the following research question:

#### 3.1.1 Research question:

Is there a significant difference between the result of discrete point (multiple choice) item type test of vocabulary and integrative cloze test of lexical words?

In other words,

Can discrete-point test of vocabulary be used instead of integrative cloze test of lexical word test in massive assessment of the learners' language proficiency?

#### 3.1.2 Research Hypotheses:

**Null hypothesis:** There is no significant correlation between these two kinds of tests.

**Hypothesis:** There is a significant correlation between these two kinds of tests.

### 3.2 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of two groups of young freshmen studying at Tabriz University. The age range of the participants of both groups varied between 19 and 25 with different first languages. Their sex was not a



controlled factor. The qualities of the two groups are considered to be homogeneous in terms of their proficiency due to the alphabetical arrangement criterion used for dividing them into two groups. The first group is just to take a non-standardized 50-item multiple-choice test of vocabulary for standardization procedure and is supposed to be exactly equal to second group. The second group who is to take the standardized multiple-choice test of vocabulary with the cloze test consists of 21 freshmen.

### 3.3 Procedure

This section deals with the selection procedure of the two to-be-administered tests. As for the multiple-choice test, first of all 50 multiple-choice tests of vocabulary were made for freshmen level of proficiency and administered to the first group. After administration the tests were primarily standardized through checking their item difficulty and item discrimination and rearranged according to their difficulty level. The outcome became a standardized 30-item multiple-choice test of vocabulary revised for the difficulty and discrimination power of its items. In other words, the test administered for primary revision included 50 items out of which 30 relatively standard items were selected for the standardized test.

The cloze test also included 30 blank items of lexical words which were selected subjectively according to the variable ratio method of item deletion. The scoring procedure adopted for the cloze test was the contextually appropriate word method. To calculate the correlation between the 30-item multiple-choice standardized test of vocabulary and the cloze test, the two tests were administered to the second group of freshmen.

### 3.4 Data analysis

In this part of the study some statistical procedures, data tabulation, display of graphs and interpretive statistics of the second group's test-taking will be explained. Some of them include the Mean, Variance, and Standard Deviation of the standardized multiple-choice test of vocabulary and the cloze test. Then the main statistical concern of the research (i.e. the correlation) will be discussed.

In the table 1 the second group's cloze test and multiple-choice test scores are shown. The scores of each individual are very near to each other. The approximate overlap between the two sets of scores is observable in figure 1.

Upon doing some descriptive statistical procedures the following data in table2 were obtained for the Mean, Variance, and Standard Deviation of the standardized multiple-choice test of vocabulary and the cloze test.

The sets of data in table 1 are delineated in figure 2.

The figure delineates well that mean, variance, and the standard deviation of the two sets of scores are near to each other. However to depend upon these descriptive figures is a premature judgment. So to base the study upon reliable data calculation procedures the appropriate process is to obtain the correlation between the two sets of scores. In the following we investigate the research hypotheses and the correlation between cloze test and multiple-choice test scores.

### 3.5 Result

The correlation between the standardized multiple-choice test of vocabulary and the cloze test we came to the figure .57 which is a relatively high correlation between two kinds of tests which are seemingly very different. Thus it is safe to reject the null-hypothesis and approve the research hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between discrete-point item test of vocabulary and integrative cloze test of lexical words.

## 4. Conclusions

According to what is obtained as the correlation between the relatively standardized multiple-choice vocabulary test scores and the cloze test scores of vocabulary the following conclusions can be made:

- 1). In testing the proficiency of a group of learners the overall result of the multiple-choice vocabulary test scores are very much like that of the cloze test scores.
- 2). According to the correlation worked out, multiple-choice tests of vocabulary could be a substitute for cloze tests of vocabulary in massive development of proficiency tests.

5. As shown by the results of the study it could be concluded that those who act better on discrete Point vocabulary also act better in cloze test of vocabulary.

### 4.1 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study were the following:

- 1). If the number of the participants was more than 21 participants the correlation would probably be strengthened.
- 2). The more the number of the items in both the discrete-point test and the cloze test the more the correlation of the between the two.

#### 4.2 Pedagogical Implications

The study has some implications for test-makers, language teachers, and syllabus designers and may be for others who are concerned with language tests of proficiency, teaching, and developing materials for EFL or ESL students. However three of them are referred to here.

- 1). The first implication will be for test makers. In most cases test-makers could make tests to test testees' knowledge of language through separate points of language (e.g. grammatical components or vocabulary items) especially in occasions being short of time to assess the proficiency of a large group of testees.
- 2). The second implication will be for language teachers in EFL or ESL settings. It is not recommended to teach language through separate components of language. But according to the study teaching through exposing language learners to integrative samples of language can just increase the rate of learning but not change the route of learning and they will seemingly have approximately the same outcome. So inclusion of discrete points of language in teaching can also be helpful not only to enable the learners to perceive and produce extensive stretches of language but also to draw analytic attention of the learners' to constituting parts of language.
- 3). The third implication goes to syllabus designers. Recently there was a tendency towards looking upon language as a holistic entity as a reaction to common analytic approaches to language teaching of past decades. But current synthetic approaches allow syllabus designers to not only put emphasis on the discoursal level of language knowledge but also show secondary concerns for the parts of it. Thus it is upon syllabus designers to include both trends in the materials they develop. However they could prioritize the holistic view of language as the primary goal and the analytic view of language as the secondary one and not to totally dispense with the latter in hope of enabling the students to fully master language use.

#### 5. Suggestions for Further Research

According to the limitations of the study and also because of being obliged to choose one of two forms of a factor involved in doing the study (e.g. scoring cloze tests either by contextually appropriate word method or by exact word method, deleting words either by fixed ratio method or by variable ratio method) there remain some other questions which could undergo further investigations. Below are some of the suggestions for either obviating the shortcomings of the present study or going through the unexplored dimensions of it.

- 1). The present study worked out the correlation between discrete-point tests of vocabulary and cloze test items of lexical words. To investigate new dimensions of the research question the correlation between discrete-point tests of grammar and cloze test items of both lexical and functional words could be calculated.
- 2). As mentioned before one of the shortcomings of the present study was the small number of testees who took part in the study. To strengthen the validity of the correlation, the number of the testees could be increased and doing so, its effect on the magnitude of the correlation could be certainly positive.
- 3). One of the other shortcomings of the study is the limited number of the test items used. To increase the validity of the obtained correlation the number of test items in both the multiple-choice of vocabulary and the cloze test could get increased to 50 or even 100 test items (however for the cloze test two or more texts could be used in order to have balanced distribution of blanks).
- 4). In the present study the participants were freshmen just having been accepted at the university. The amount of the correlation for other levels of proficiency could be obtained too.
- 5). In this study the participants' age and sex were taken for granted. Further investigation could be done to evaluate the proficiency of different age and sex groups.
- 6). In the present study to assess the testees' vocabulary knowledge only those items in the cloze test were deleted that were regarded as lexical items. So the procedure adopted for the deletion of words was inevitably a variable ratio method. For further research the fixed ratio method could be used to assess the effect of the change in deletion procedure on the magnitude of the correlation between the two kinds of tests.
- 7). For scoring the cloze tests the scoring procedure in this study was the contextually appropriate word method. To assess the effect of the change in the scoring procedure on the correlation magnitude between the two kinds of tests the exact word method of scoring could be adopted.

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## Appendices

Table 1. *Cloze Test and Multiple-choice Test Scores*

Student	Cloze Test Score	Multiple-choice Test
1	27	27
2	27	22
3	27	18
4	26	25
5	26	19
6	26	27
7	24	25
8	23	23
9	23	25
10	23	24
11	23	21
12	23	25
13	23	24
14	22	23
15	22	25
16	21	16
17	21	22
18	19	18
19	17	19
20	16	15
21	15	18

Table 2. Mean, Variance, and Standard Deviation of the standardized multiple-choice test of vocabulary and the cloze test

Test Type	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation
Multiple-choice Test	21.95	12.84	3.58
Cloze Test	22.57	12.35	3.51

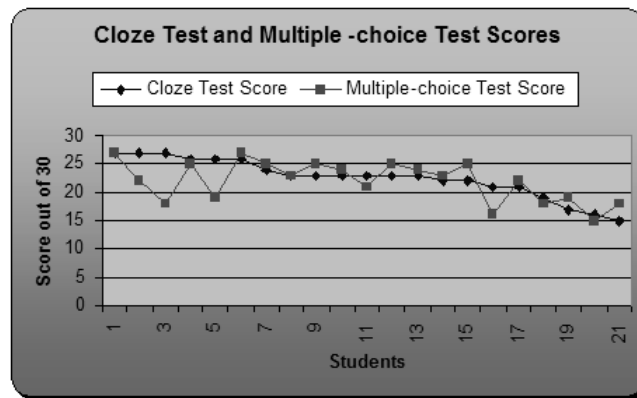


Figure 1. Cloze Test and Multiple-choice Test Scores

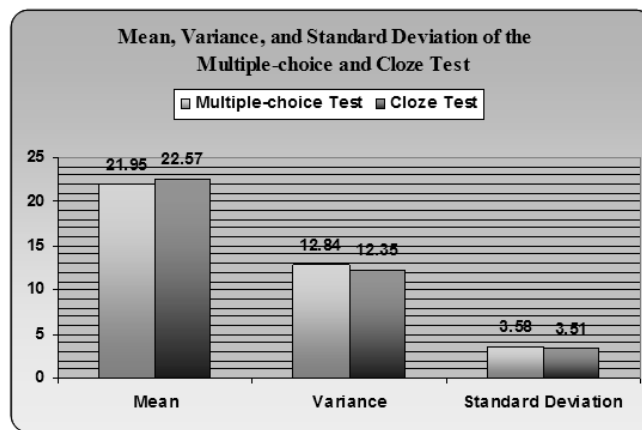


Figure 2. Mean, Variance, and Standard Deviation of the multiple-choice test of vocabulary and the cloze test



## On Power Relation in the Design of Language Research Project and the Analysis of Data

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### Abstract

How to deal with the relationship between the researcher and the 'researched' is crucial thing in design of language research project and the analysis of data. The paper mainly focuses the influence of power relations between the researcher and the 'researched' people. To do social research 'on, for and with' subject does not only benefit the researched, but also benefits the researcher. In the empowering research, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is like a part of process of social interaction and like the relationships among the researched.

**Keywords:** Power relation, Language research, The researcher, The 'researched'

### 1. Introduction

'Any social researcher who has undertaken fieldwork must at some level be aware that power relations exist in this context as in others' (Cameron et al, 1997:145).

It is generally believed that the relationship between the researcher and the 'researched' is odds relationship. The researcher always controls the research from the beginning to the end, moreover, acquire what she/he needs. Is this the correct way to do social research? In the 1990s, Cameron and her colleagues (1992, 1997) point out there are three kinds of relationships between the researcher and the 'researched': ethical, advocacy and empowerment. To understand these three kinds of relationships, one needs to know the three key words: *on*, *for* and *with*. The ethical model is to do research *on*, the advocacy is to do research *on* and *for*, and empowering research is *on*, *for* and *with* (Cameron et al, 1997). Before we explain these three kinds of relationships, we need to define the 'researched'. Generally speaking, the 'researched' means the people who the researcher studies and the researched subject which the researcher studies. The people who the researchers research can be divided into two kinds: the informant and the participant. The informants, like its literal meaning, are the people who only provide the material related to the research subject. The participants refer to the people who not only offer the related information but also participate in the research.

According to my understanding, in ethical research, the relationship between the researcher and the informants (here people only offer the information.) is an imbalanced one. The informants play a passive role in the research project. The researcher is the only beneficiary. However, the advocacy model shows that the informants not only provide the researched material but benefit from the research, i.e. 'it places the researcher in the position of an advocate, engaging in research not only *on* social subjects, as in the ethical framework, but also *for* them' (Cameron et al, 1997:148). Comparing the third model with the first two models, the major difference between them is that the participants are part of the major difference is the participants who are part of the research in the empowering research, like what Cameron et al (1992: 56) stated 'this involves more than the researcher entering into dialogue in order to find out local points of view- it entails informants taking part in the construction of theories about their own experience'.

I have mentioned above that the 'researched' also means the research subject. Normally, the researcher chooses his/her subject through observation from life, or from reading the related articles. As a social researcher she/he needs to prove his/her idea, i.e. hypothesis, via doing the research. When the researcher conducts the research project, sometimes the process of the research project will make the researcher change the subject due to some facts and other specific reasons.

This paper will mainly focus the influence of power relations between the researcher and the 'researched' people via the design of a languages-related research project as well as the analysis of its findings.

### 2. Power relation on the design of research project

Research design is a process of 'translating a very general research aim or purpose into specific, concrete questions to which specific, concrete answer can be given' (Cohen et al, 2000:75). We need to think lots of particular questions over before designing the research project, for example, what kinds of data are required? How will the data be gathered? Who will undertake the research? Here we will mainly focus on why think about the relationships between the researcher and the researched and how do they affect?

### 2.1 *Why consider the power relation?*

The aim of the language research is to find some special language phenomena and their related problem. This kind of research project is conducted between/among people, i.e. the researcher and the researched. Generally speaking, the ideal relationship between the researcher and the researched is equal and honesty. However that ideal is hard to realize. The empowering research would be the best one, the researched is empowered not powerless. Moreover, 'often, the researched can exert power over researcher by virtue of what they know that researchers do not' (Cameron et al, 1997:156). This is not good, in my view, if the researched is too powerful, the research could be out of the control. It can not achieve the purpose of the social research. By the same token, if the researcher is too powerful, the result of the research will lose its objectivity.

Therefore, when we consider how to design the research project, we should pay more attention to the relationship between the researcher and the researched, because it will influence the result's validity and reliability of the result. Both validity and reliability is the key point to effective research, especial in quantitative and qualitative research. 'It is suggested that reliability is a necessary but insufficient condition for validity in research; reliability is a necessary precondition of validity' If a piece of research is invalid and unreliability then it is worthless (Cohen et al, 2000:105).

### 2.2 *The influential aspects in the design of research project*

When we design a language-related research project, the following points should be taken into consideration.

#### 2.2.1 Obtaining the participants consent

BAAL guidelines (1994) describe 'Relationships with informants should be founded on trust and openness. They should be informed about all aspects of research that might reasonably be expected to affect their willingness to participate.' This is very essential point for doing the research. Before we start our research project, the first thing is to get the participants real consent whether in oral form or written one. If the participants are children under sixteen years old, the researcher must obtain both children's and their parents' permission. In addition, the researcher should respect people's decision not to participate.

At the same time, the researcher should offer the participants some information about this research. That will help them to make a decision. But how much is it necessary to give them? How does the researcher tell them, direct way or indirect way? For example, if the researcher interests in people using profanity. Can they tell them directly? Therefore, personally speaking, there is hard to define.

#### 2.2.2 Doing the research *with* the participants

As the social researcher, like Cameron et al point out (1992:23) we might let the participants to be active co-operators, i.e. the participants should not be treated as objects and their thought should be respected about the research by the researcher. Sometimes the researcher may share 'knowledge' about the procedures of research with the researched.

#### 2.2.3 Considering the participants' age, gender, and characteristics

According to my own research in China, I found the participants' age, gender and characteristics also influence the relationship between the researcher and the researched. I will use my example to explain this point later.

In the anthropologist Charles Briggs' case (1986), some of his informants were senior to him, they treat him not like the researcher to answer his questions, but take the chance to educate him as a parental role (Cameron, 2001:146). The relationship between the researcher and the researched was changed due to the participants' age. 'As Briggs point out, an illuminating analysis of the resulting data would need to take account of the fact that informants saw what they were doing not as "answering an expert's questions" but "educating a young and ignorant newcomer"' (Cameron, 2001:146).

#### 2.2.4 Choosing the suitable place/environment

The place/ environment, where the research will be taken place, should not give the participants uncomfortable feeling while using interview or questionnaire to conduct the research. For example, if the place is the researchers' office, that will make the participants feel more pressure, while in a pub or club, which will be too noisy for interviewing or tape-recording. As the participants are also the co-operators of the research, the researching place can be decided by both of them, not one side.

#### 2.2.5 Making sure the tools working

Here the tools mean the audio-recorder or even the video camera, etc. If the researchers use them during their research, it would be better to check first. It can avoid some problems during the research even when analyzing the results.

There are still some aspects influencing the design of the research project. I would like use my own example to explain why I think above five points are needed to be considering firstly. I had done a research about seeking the motivation of Chinese students to learn second language. I chose thirty male students and thirty female English-major students in my department from my university. Their ages are from eighteen years old to twenty-one years old, i.e. all of them were

born in 1980s (At that time, China had been doing the reform and opening the gate). Some of them came from cities, some from rural areas. I chose questionnaires and interviews(in English) as means of conducting the research, because the questionnaires can collect a large number of data to do comparison easily, but it is hard to know the participants' reasons for choosing the answer. Considered about this points, I also chose the interviews, 'interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen et al, 2000:267).

With the help of my department, I told all of undergraduate students (450) in my department I need them to help me with a research project. I told them the aim of this research, and what they need to do as part of this research. Firstly, under their permissions, I let all of them to complete the questionnaire. Secondly, considering the students' age, gender, characteristics (extroversion and introversion) and family background, I chose sixty students to do the interviews under their consent. These students were from first year, second year and third year, because the fourth year students needed to do their teaching practice, I didn't chose them. The place for us to have an interview was chosen by the researched students and me. Their classroom as our working place, because they felt relaxed and comfortable in their classroom. But one thing I could not control was the noise from outside, and that made the quality of some recording data not very well. To make sure the data was corrected; I made notes and also used the recorder-pen to record interviews. The interview we did was kind of 'institutional talk', but the atmosphere made it looked like 'ordinary' talk. Because the good 'quality of data is dependent on the quality of the relationship build up between the interviewer and interviewee' (Arksey & Knight, 1999:101). So during the interviews, I asked questions and also answered some questions. I was not the complete dominator; I was also a participant like my students. After the interviews, I gave some gifts to my students for thanks. From this research, I found it was very interesting that the students' gender, character and family background had great influence with the interviews and also the results. For instance, one of girls from Qingdao, whose character was easy-going, she was a good co-operator during the interview. She not only answered my questions but also asked lots of related questions about our research subject. The interview with her was out of my control for a short while.

### **3. The influence of power relation on the analysis of research's findings**

When we design the research project, we need to think the power relation between the researcher and the researched. Moreover, we also ask to consider the power relation between them during the process of the analysis of its finding. There are several sides affect the analysis research's findings.

#### *3.1 'Confidentiality and anonymity'*

The participants have the right to ask the researchers to keep their responses confidential for personal reasons. Their request should be respected. And the researcher also can deal with them by anonymity. Furthermore it will be good for asking the participants again after the researchers finish their process of data-collection, sometimes. 'But it is important to let informants know that it is not always possible to conceal identities completely, and that anonymity can sometimes be compromised unintentionally' (BAAL guidelines, 1994).

#### *3.2 Validity and reliability*

Generally speaking, the research's results cannot be of hundred percent of validity and reliability because it is impossible. Still take my own example--interview, to achieve the greater validity is to reduce, to the greatest extent, the amount of bias. 'The source of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions' (Cohen et al, 2000: 121). For reliability, one way to control it is to have a highly structured interview, i.e. have same modality, same words and same questions for every participant.

#### *3.3 The researchers*

When the researchers analyze their research's findings, can they identify their findings truthfully and completely? The researchers have their own aim about their research, something they want to prove it, something not. That is to say, the researchers themselves, personally speaking, including their character and gender, could influence the analysis of research's findings. Moreover, even the researchers realize this point; it is hard to avoid it, because the researchers themselves are human beings, in other words, the researchers' emotion must influence their estimation and they cannot be real objective person for their research. For example, I recorded the interviews during my research, transcribing would be the first stage of analysis and interpretation. 'A transcription is supposed to be a full and faithful written/graphic representation of spoken material' (Cameron, 2001:32). Obviously the researcher should write down every word they heard from their tape-recorded data. There is no standard way for transcribing talk, so different researchers work at hearing them accurately and represent them differently. Therefore, the researcher may analyze the data without complete objectivity. During my period of transcription, I transcribed twice and the result was not the same. I think the reason could be my listening ability and my impression for students.

#### *3.4 The researched*

There are two aspects about the researched as the researcher need to consider when they analyze the research findings.

The first point is the researched emotional factor, and the second one will be discussed later.

Every human being has the emotional period of highs or lows. Under the researched consent, sometimes the researched even cannot cooperate well with the researchers due to their physical or emotional limitations. To put another way, the researched will not understand the aim of the research in normal way. Even they will offer incorrect information. That will indirectly affect the result of research.

### 3.5 Feedback

BAAL guidelines (1994) indicate ‘wherever possible, final project reports should be made available in an accessible form to informants and informants should have the right to comment on them.’

As mentioned above, the researched are the co-operators with the research. Therefore, ‘if knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing’ (Cameron et al, 1997:134); that is to say, the researcher should talk to the researched and share with them. It calls on ‘feedback’ technique, which is to express the findings to the researched in order to obtain more informed consent for the research subject about the researched or their community. It is a good way to continue the dialogue between the researcher and the researched (Cameron et al, 1997:157).

The way of taking feedback can be formal or informal. The researcher can hold a meeting to share his/her findings with the researched. Or the researched finds some questions via the research which he/she attended to ask the researchers. The researcher’s answer can make the researched know the findings; in addition, their questions will illuminate the researcher’s new thought.

At last, the feedback will be good information for the researchers when they consider publication and dissemination of the research findings (Cameron et al, 1992:42).

## 4. Conclusion

To do social research ‘on, for and with’ subject does not only benefit the researched, but also benefits the researcher. In the empowering research, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is like a part of process of social interaction and like the relationships among the researched.

Personally speaking, as a language teacher, what I deal with is all language and students. Thus it may be concluded that the empowering research is the suitable one to be adopted. To sum up, I would like use a number of guidelines formulated by Cameron et al (1992:128) to end my paper.

- 1) Ask questions that interest the researched group or are generated by them.
- 2) Be open about your agenda and negotiate at all stages.
- 3) Make the knowledge and perceptions of the researched group count; do not impose an ‘expert’ framework unthinkingly.
- 4) On the other hand, share information and analytic tools; the group may reject them but it is wrong to assume from the outset they do not want to know.
- 5) Present what you learn from research in such a way that the researched group will find it accessible.’

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## Language Arts with a Focus on Media: Facilitating Students' Entry in the World of Literacy

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### Abstract

This paper briefly describes the function of media literacy in the classroom. Beginning with the notion that language is socially constructed, the paper focuses on how it is possible to incorporate a field that is familiar and accessible to all, in our teaching. Furthermore, the advantages of studying the media are outlined and supported by existing studies. Teachers who strive to show sensitivity to their students ought to include texts that are central to their students' lives.

**Keywords:** Media, literacy, Language, mass media, Popular culture

Without going into an extensive discussion about history, it is obvious that power struggles have existed and persisted over the centuries. There have been many who have dedicated their lives to bringing about change yet it is "his"-tory that prevails. "He" who belongs to the dominant group in society. By virtue of having similar backgrounds, colour, religion, gender and experiences, a portion of the population has acquired a self-proclaimed right to exert its influence on all aspects of our existence. The reality as well as the danger of this situation has become more apparent with the major changes that have occurred in the world over the last few decades. The increase in migration, technological advances and globalization allows for the power of such self-serving individuals to become more widespread and result in the oppression and indoctrination of many more individuals and societies. These are the stories that must be emphasized if we are to learn from the past and make a difference for the future. Equity and social justice have become part of our vocabulary but as educators we are obligated to take on more than a politician's approach of talking about such terms. We must take action, even if that type of action involves taking risks.

Teaching and learning are primarily social practices. As education is part of the larger social framework which involves social beings with competing interests and goals, teachers might find themselves in a tug of war between governing bodies and students. It is essential however to bear in mind that students ought to be our main focus and their personalities, experiences and needs must guide our actions. We must exhibit flexibility in our teaching practice so as to ensure that our students find meaning in what they are exposed to in the classroom. They will find pleasure in learning that is relevant to their life in the past, present and future. That must be the concern of the classroom teacher who shall critically examine the demands placed on them by those who set the standards and select the teaching material themselves, before they can pass on such skills to their students.

"Literacy is the cornerstone of all learning and success in school...and cannot be viewed as merely a subject to be learned in school, as it impacts on all aspects of learning, both in the classroom and in the world beyond" (Pollishuke & Schwartz, 2005). Due to its cross-curricular significance, literacy has been a topic that has brought about much debate all over the world. Scholars from many fields are questioning instructional approaches and attempt to discover some "magical" method to "solve" student reading and writing problems (Luke, 1998). Unfortunately, as it is evident through the on-going debates, the answers are not simple as we cannot rely on a "one size fits all" approach to literacy. Literacy extends beyond reading and includes writing, listening and talking about text. Furthermore, different curricular approaches and their accompanying textbooks, assessment tools and classroom practices shape literacy differently. The way that literacies are shaped could have uneven benefits for some children and continue to favour already advantaged groups (Luke, 1998). Traditional practices have focused on transmitting the information that has been deemed as valuable by certain members of society to future generations. Rather than confronting a diverse student population with the obviously difficult task of making sense out of meaningless writing, educators who truly strive to create an inclusive classroom can begin to examine what their students have been exposed to, what they are currently facing as well as consider what their future will demand. Looking ahead is necessary as it is our ultimate goal. We are aiming at providing students with tools that will assist them in achieving long-term personal and professional goals. As part of the wider community, schools must have a realistic view of textual practices that can enable people to alter their material circumstances rather than focus on "pitches" to promote one strategy or another (Luke, 1998).

As part of our effort to level the playing field, I suggest incorporating media literacy in our classroom. Regardless of class or background every child is currently exposed to the media in one way or another. This enables teachers to create lessons that can be appreciated by all. I have discussed the social construction of literacy at length, possibly too much

for the scope of this paper, yet it has been a topic that has interested me since the beginning of my teaching career and led to my familiarity with media literacy. My own teaching experiences as well as the current literature, although limited in my opinion, have highlighted the value of using mass media and popular culture in the classroom. Furthermore, as there has been little public enthusiasm for its use among educators, leaders and parents (Hobbs, 2004), I found it necessary to emphasize the reasons for my belief that media literacy is beneficial.

Reading in the classroom those products of popular culture about which students already have some knowledge increases students' confidence and in turn their motivation. Familiar and interesting texts are able to transform the students into a community of learners where critical discussions can occur and experiences can be shared with equal membership in the community (Martin, 2003). Moreover, as media texts are central to the lives of students, it must be addressed critically in the classroom to ensure that students are capable of evaluating the messages that the media are sending (Martin, 2003) and hopefully to "gain liberation from oppressive ideologies" (Freire, 1970) and increase social action. Finally, providing such opportunities in the classroom prepares students to be critical thinkers in the outside world. This may very well be the key to bridging both worlds (Martin, 2003).

While teaching English abroad, I watched students' interest and progress increase as I integrated popular songs, magazines and films into my lessons. This opened the door for studying the language as well as bridging about enlightening conversations amongst the students that extended beyond the scope of ESL instruction. It was truly rewarding to see how these discussions strengthened the bond between the students in my classes who came from different social and ethnic backgrounds as well as broadened their views of our society. Although I stumbled upon this form of instruction as I sought to engage my students in the difficult task of learning a foreign language in their native country where the only context they had for the use of the language was related to the various forms of media, it has come to my attention that a body of 25 years of scholarship and theory exists on the subject (Hobbs, 2004).

In the 1980s when the realization that the media was here to stay had finally set in, incorporating popular culture in the curriculum became more common. Walsh (2006) indicated that initially a "suck them in" approach was employed, by which teachers used songs, movies or magazines to gain students' attention before moving on to the classical studies. Later on, training students to cultivate a critical view on media products was attempted (Thoman, 1990). Educators were compelled to become responsive to what Masterman (1985, 24) had identified as the central role for media education: the ability to apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to the world of everyday life. Students were directed to question what was represented in media texts and whose "reality" was being portrayed. During this stage, researchers began to focus on the sociopolitical analysis of mass media (Brown, 1991; Hobbs, 1994) yet schools seldom moved to such a paradigm shift of media education.

Although the curriculum was eventually amended to contain an element of media education, the goals of media education are far from being met. Issues of conceptualization and application have hindered its progression in our educational system (Chen, 2007). Views on media literacy typically follow two incompatible perspectives: the cultural studies approach and the inoculation approach (Scharrer, 2002/2003). Although the cultural studies approach emphasizes students' experiences with the media and the pleasure it offers, the inoculation approach that highlights the negative aspects of the media, continues to dominate the field of media education. Furthermore, a lack of consensus on how to design and deliver media education curriculum and how to assess such programs (Christ & Potter, 1998) continue to obstruct our view of the benefits that could be acquired through systematic studies of media.

"Reading" media requires the same types of skills as reading print texts (Martin, 2003). According to Rosenblatt's transactional theory, (1995), the meaning of any text does not lie in the print but in the readers' interaction with the words. Readers bring their own experiences to the text and it is these that influence the understanding they build on the words. It is therefore easier to understand why media texts have a role in the teaching of reading. What holds true for a poem or a novel is also true for an ad, a television show or a movie (Hong, 2002). It is by helping students become aware of their active use of literacy skills through interaction with popular culture that will enable them to transfer these skills to school literacy learning (Hong, 2002). When students in an urban high school in California for example, were exposed to Hip-hop music in the classroom, they displayed an understanding of imagery, metaphor, irony and tone that had not been apparent with the mere use of traditional texts. Furthermore, this group of students who often resisted traditional learning material took part in consciousness-raising discussions, essays and research projects (Morrelle & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

In another study, Shelley Hong Xu (2002), worked with teachers to examine how the integration of popular culture in literacy instruction affected student learning. The lessons with student popular culture included both print and non-print texts, taught literacy skills and engaged students. The teachers learned that popular culture did have a place in teaching as they would be in a better position for preparing students for life during which they would "read" and "write" both print and non-print texts that exist in modern society (Hong, 2002). These studies indicate that there are educators who acknowledge that there is a deeper meaning and purpose to education than merely passing down a common body of knowledge from generation to generation. As a result of our rapidly changing society we must aim at altering our practices if we are to prepare students for the real world, yet questions have been raised regarding the effect that media literacy has on students.

Opponent of using media in the classroom insist that it has the effect of “dumbing down” public education (Hobbs, 2004) and insist that popular culture texts are often “too transparent or too thin to support much discussion or debate...When they are brought into the classroom...there may be little to sustain conversation” (Applebee, 1996). Such doubts might result from the confusion about whether the goal of education is to teach inert information or to teach thinking (Martin, 2003). I choose the latter and thus insist that when students find true meaning in what they are learning, when they are stimulated by their experiences in school and when these lessons can lead to a true awareness of issues facing society then media literacy obviously does have a very significant place in the classroom. Furthermore, we can hope that by broadening students’ perceptions of the power-relations and the propaganda that are part of our social reality, the next generation will be better able to cope with inequality and discrimination than we have thus far. Obviously there will always be those that oppose such attempts – those who have too much to lose if our children became exposed to “too much information” and they will try to criticize teachers for using media literacy as a propagandizing tool (Hobbs, 2004) but we must keep in mind the benefits it could hold for its acceptance in our educational system. And this shall result through the bottom-up effort of individual teachers. Media literacy education depends on the courage and determination of teachers who are motivated to incorporate mass media and popular culture into their lessons (Hobbs, 2004). Teachers must work together to share their findings with colleagues, to support and train others in using media and to gain the parents’ approval, perhaps through workshops and more importantly through their children’s achievements.

As reading and writing are primarily socially situated, such acts require that the participants be affiliated with the school-based, literacy-related practices (Gee, 1990). An environment that reflects the lived experiences of all its members is welcoming and inspiring. Since the members of our classrooms – the students – are all surrounded and influenced by the media in their daily lives, discovering that their lessons include such familiar texts can allow them to gain more of a sense of community in the classroom which in turn can lead to more meaningful learning. As teachers who strive to show sensitivity to the needs of our students, I believe we have an obligation to include popular culture into our teaching practice even if that entails moving beyond our own comfort level. The children who shall enter our classroom are alive, active and inquisitive. How can we expect them to thrive in a class that is cold, dull and lifeless?

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## FL Vocabulary Learning of Undergraduate English Majors in Western China: Perspective, Strategy Use and Vocabulary Size

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### Abstract

The present study, by use of questionnaire and vocabulary tests, has investigated the foreign language vocabulary learning situation of 481 undergraduates in terms of their perspective of vocabulary learning, strategy use and vocabulary size. Based on the questionnaire investigation and vocabulary level tests, the characteristics of the subjects' foreign language vocabulary learning have been outlined: (1) Objects have the belief that vocabulary should be learned by using them; the most frequently used strategies include dictionary use, guessing the meaning and note-taking; objects average out to a small vocabulary size. (2) Significant differences exist in the use of some strategies between different graders and different majors. (3) Four strategies (cognitive & meta-cognitive) significantly correlate with vocabulary size. In order to facilitate learners' foreign language vocabulary development, four tentative solutions have been offered to solve the relevant problems: (1) Raising learners' awareness of FL vocabulary development and try to enlarge their vocabulary size; (2) Developing learners' productive vocabulary by using the target words in authentic contexts; (3) Fostering learners' awareness of using appropriate vocabulary learning strategies; (4) Broadening learners' vocabulary learning approaches by utilizing both the intentional (direct) learning methods and the incidental (indirect) ones. The research results may probably offer empirical reference for the foreign language vocabulary teaching and learning in China.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary learning strategy, Vocabulary development, Receptive vocabulary size, Productive vocabulary size

### 1. Introduction

As the communicative teaching approach prevailed in the 1970s, people have realized that vocabulary is the basis of any language. FL vocabulary learning is vital in FL learning because to a certain extent, learners' FL proficiency is greatly determined by their mastery of FL vocabulary (Sökmen, 1997). Since then, vocabulary teaching and learning has been paid increasing attention in FL teaching. In the last thirty years, the studies on perspectives and strategies of vocabulary learning have attracted lots of researchers' interest, and become the key topics in vocabulary learning research. In the related studies abroad, Gains & Redman (1986), Cohen (1990), Nation (1990, 2001), Hatch & Brown (1995) examined various strategies used in vocabulary learning; Sanaoui (1995), Lawson & Hogben (1996) compared the vocabulary learning methods and strategies of learners with different proficiencies (top students and poor students); Krantz (1991), Luppescu & Day (1993), Grabe & Stoller (1997) studied the correlation between extensive reading, using dictionaries and vocabulary learning; Schmitt (1997) empirically investigated 600 Japanese learners' FL vocabulary learning strategies.

Studies on vocabulary learning strategy in China dates back to the 1980s. The representative studies that reflect the mainstream perspective and achievements in this domain include: Wang (1998) invited 50 subjects and studied the relationship between perspective, strategy use and retention effects of English vocabulary learning; Wu & Wang (1998) focused on the strategies used in English vocabulary learning by Non-English majors; Zhang (2001) did a similar study on the English vocabulary learning strategy of postgraduates; Gu (1994), Gu & Hu (2003) investigated the relationship between learners' vocabulary learning strategy, vocabulary size and English achievements. These studies, on the one hand, have been quite effective in exploring the field of vocabulary learning strategy and promoting vocabulary teaching and learning practice in China; on the other hand, they have provided methodologically good examples for the researchers in China including so many EFL teachers, and therefore improved the research quality in this domain.

Among the studies reviewed above, we failed to find one specifically focusing on the characteristics of EFL learners' vocabulary learning strategy in Western China. As a university English teacher in this region, I intuitively have the idea that the undergraduates in Western China have not used effectively appropriate strategies to learn English vocabulary because most of them are accustomed to direct learning (memorization). In order to see if any evidence can be collected to support this intuition and whether there are any problems in their English vocabulary learning, we have designed this

study, and consider it worthwhile. We aim at answering the following six questions in the study:

- (1) What are the characteristics of the subjects' FL vocabulary learning in terms of their perspective, strategy use and vocabulary size?
- (2) Is there any difference between male and female learners' vocabulary learning perspective and strategy use?
- (3) Is there any difference between the learners with different proficiencies in terms of their vocabulary learning perspective and strategy use?
- (4) Is there any difference between English and Non-English majors' vocabulary learning perspective and strategy use?
- (5) Is there any difference between learners' receptive and productive vocabulary sizes?
- (6) Is there any correlation between learners' strategy use and their vocabulary size?

## 2. Research design

### 2.1 Instruments

Two kinds of instruments have been adopted in the present study: one is the questionnaire of vocabulary learning, and the other is vocabulary level tests.

As Oxford (1990) states that cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are more important in SL/FL learning, we focus on these two types of strategies utilized by our subjects in the study. The questionnaire has been adapted by slightly revising Gu & Johnson's VLQ5 (1996), considering our practical situation and the operability. Three major dimensions have been included in the questionnaire, namely perspective of vocabulary learning, meta-cognitive strategy and cognitive strategy, which have been further divided into 21 variables, and each variable consists of 2 or 3 items, 60 items in all (see the table below). The Likert 5-scale scoring method has been adopted: behind each item, there are 5 numbers (from 1 to 5), which means: 1= completely disagree or the item is completely untrue for me; 2= usually disagree or the item is usually untrue for me; 3= agree sometimes or the item is sometimes true for me; 4= usually agree or the item is usually true for me; 5= completely agree or the item is completely true for me. The subjects are required to select the relevant number according to their own perspective and strategy use of vocabulary learning.

Insert Table 1 Here.

There are two vocabulary level tests in the study: The Receptive Levels Test (A Vocabulary Levels Test: Test B-The 5000 Word Level) designed by Norbert Schmitt, Diane Schmitt and C. Clapham based on Nation (1990); The Productive Levels Test: Version C (The 3000 Word Level) by Nation (2001). In the receptive levels test, there are 10 groups of words with 6 in each, and the subjects are required to pick out three from the 6 words given in each group to match the relevant explanations on the right respectively; in the productive levels test, there are 18 sentences, and the subjects need to spell out the underlined word (the initial 2 ~ 4 letters have been given) in each sentence. Subjects' vocabulary sizes can be calculated according to the number of the correct items they have got and the grades of the tests.

### 2.2 Subjects

We randomly selected 500 undergraduate subjects from 6 universities in five provinces in Western China, and invited them to respond to the questionnaire investigation and take the vocabulary levels tests. After the investigation and tests, we received the valid questionnaires and tests papers of 481 subjects, among whom there are 223 males, 258 females; 196 English majors and 285 Non-English majors; 180 sophomores, 164 juniors and 137 seniors.

### 2.3 Study implementation

The questionnaire investigation and vocabulary levels tests were done between September and November in 2007. One or two teachers in each of the six universities were invited to help carry out the investigation and tests during their classroom teaching time to avoid the subjects' casual ticking and spelling. After receiving the 481 subjects' valid questionnaires and test papers, we scored them carefully, and finally, by using SPSS 13.0 to do the data analysis, we got the statistical results in terms of the total descriptives, comparison between male and female subjects' perspective and strategy use, comparison between different graders' perspective and strategy use, comparison between English and Non-English majors' perspective and strategy use, comparison between subjects' receptive and productive vocabulary sizes, and the correlation between strategy use and vocabulary size.

## 3. Results of the data analyses

### 3.1 Total descriptives

Insert Table 2 Here.

Table 2 provides us with the variable description and the basic statistical results, including minimum score, maximum score, mean and standard deviation. Observing the column of "Mean", we can find that only 3 variables have been

reported well-used (Mean>3.5), while the others haven't, and among which 8 have been poorly-used (Mean<3.0). These indicate that the subjects in the study have not satisfactorily been using most of the vocabulary learning strategies. The three frequently-used strategies are "using dictionary" (Mean=3.7662/3.7369), "Guessing meaning in contexts" (Mean=3.5141/3.4329) and "taking notes" (Mean=3.4043/3.3979), which belong to the cognitive strategies used in the initial treatment stage, but for those important cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies needed to be used in the stages of reinforcement and trying using, the data show that the use of them is far from being satisfactory.

As far as the perspective of vocabulary learning is concerned, most subjects hold the idea of "learning words by using" (Mean=4.0684) but do not support the idea of "learning words by rote memorization" (Mean=2.7515), which corresponds to Gu & Hu's (2003) conclusion. However, it is not difficult to find many students (who believe that words should be learned in the process of using them in contexts) learning English words by oral or visual repetition, e.g. memorizing wordlists, which seems to suggest that the perspective and strategy that learners consider correct and effective do not really match what they have actually adopted.

### 3.2 Comparison between male and female subjects

For the 21 variables listed in Table 3, only slight differences have been found between male and female subjects' perspective and strategy use of vocabulary learning except for the sixth and eighteenth variables in which the difference is almost significant (Sig.=0.098/0.074). For the perspective of vocabulary learning, both the male and female subjects believe that words should be learned in the process of using them (Mean=3.97/4.11) and do not agree with the perspective of learning words only by memorization (Mean=2.84/2.71); for the use of strategies, male subjects outperformed female subjects in 10 variables, while in return female subjects outperformed males ones in 11 variables. This is similar to Li's finding (2002) but does not completely agree with Oxford, Nyikos and Ehrman's (1988) conclusion that the use of learning strategies significantly correlates with gender: females are generally more skillful than males at using learning strategies, especially the social-interactive strategy. We assume that one possible and risky cause for this controversy is that the social-interactive strategy has not been included in the present study.

Insert Table 3 Here.

### 3.3 Comparison between different graders

By comparing the vocabulary learning perspective and strategy use of the subjects in Grade 2, 3 and 4, we find that significant difference exists in the use of five strategies, and Table 4 lists the statistical data of the five variables.

As can be seen in Table 4, the juniors outperformed significantly the sophomores in using "imagic and visual coding" strategy; the seniors surpassed the sophomores in the use of three strategies: "using dictionaries for learning", "associating" and "imagic and visual coding", and the difference reached significant level; the difference between the juniors and the seniors in using the four strategies is a little bit complex: the juniors have more frequently used "visual repeating" than the seniors, while in using the strategies of "selective noticing", "using dictionaries for learning", and "imagic and visual coding", the seniors outperformed significantly the juniors. To sum up, subjects in higher grades have been more frequently and skillfully using vocabulary learning strategies than those in lower grades.

Insert Table 4 Here.

### 3.4 Comparison between English and Non-English majors

Table 5 indicates that English majors and Non-English majors hold similar perspective on vocabulary learning: a little more Non-English majors believe that vocabulary need to be learned by rote memorization while more English majors agree with the idea that words should be learned in the process of using them, and the difference is far from being significant.

Among the 19 learning strategies, English majors have more frequently used 17 than Non-English majors, and the difference between the two groups of subjects in using the two strategies (using background and textual information, and using dictionary for word learning) has reached significant level, which seems to indicate that English majors are more capable of utilizing the background knowledge and textual information related to the subject to guess word meaning and learn words. Meanwhile, for dictionary-using strategies, English majors are more likely to relate dictionary use to their vocabulary learning. Therefore, dictionary use has been considered as a method of vocabulary learning rather than a tool for solving the vocabulary problem in reading activities, which is a prominent difference between English and Non-English majors in terms of using dictionaries.

Insert Table 5 Here.

### 3.5 Comparison between subjects' receptive and productive vocabulary sizes

After testing and scoring 481 subjects' receptive and productive vocabulary sizes, we have adopted the Paired-Sample T Test to compare these two vocabulary sizes. Table 5 indicates that the subjects' receptive vocabulary size is much bigger than their productive vocabulary size, and significant difference has been found ( $t=786.353$ ,  $\text{sig.}=0.000$ ), which

is one of the serious problems in EFL learners' vocabulary development, that is the imbalance of the quantity and quality of vocabulary learning.

Insert Table 6 Here.

### 3.6 Correlation between strategy use and vocabulary size

By doing the correlation analysis on the 21 variables (perspectives and strategies) and vocabulary sizes, we find that there are only 4 strategies significantly correlated with vocabulary sizes, which have been listed in Table 7.

To begin with, the two learning strategies of "using dictionary for word learning" ( $r=.179/.156$ ,  $p=.013/.031$ ) and "noting down usage" ( $r=.168/.163$ ,  $p=.020/.024$ ) significantly correlate positively with vocabulary size at the 0.05 level, that is, the better subjects use the two strategies, the larger their vocabulary size, which corresponds to Gu & Hu's conclusion (2003); Next, the strategy of "visual repeating" ( $r=-.163/-.196$ ,  $p=.025/.007$ ) correlates negatively with vocabulary sizes: the negative correlation has reached significant at the 0.05 level with subjects' receptive vocabulary size and at the 0.01 level with their productive vocabulary size, which well matches the conclusions of Gu & Johnson (1996) and Gu & Hu (2003), which proves that learning vocabulary only by visual repetition has a negative influence on the growing of vocabulary size (especially the productive one), and this validates the important role of information processing depth in vocabulary learning and retention (Craik & Tulving, 1975); Then, "trying using" strategy also positively correlates significantly with vocabulary sizes at the 0.05 level ( $r=0.158/0.166$ ,  $p=0.029/0.022$ ), which reveals that learners will probably have larger receptive and productive vocabulary sizes if they often use frequently the target words in oral and written activities, and this further supports the perspective that words are learned in the process of using them; Finally, the significant positive correlation between receptive and productive vocabulary sizes at the 0.01 level suggests that receptive vocabulary size is the essential basis and precondition for the development of productive vocabulary size.

Insert Table 7 Here.

## 4. Findings and discussions

### 4.1 Major findings

Based on the questionnaire investigation, vocabulary level tests and the interviews with some of the subjects, we are able to outline the characteristics of FL vocabulary learning of the undergraduates in Western China represented by the 481 subjects:

- (1) Generally speaking, the undergraduates hold the perspective of learning vocabulary in the process of using them in contexts and do not agree with that of learning vocabulary only by rote memorization; the three learning strategies they have been using most frequently are "using dictionary", "guessing word meaning in contexts" and "taking notes"; the vocabulary sizes they have average out to about 2156 (receptive) and 859 (productive).
- (2) As for the strategy use, no significant difference exists between males and females, but the difference between different graders, and that between English and Non-English majors have reached significant level. To be exact, undergraduates in higher grades have more frequently and successfully used vocabulary learning strategies than those in lower grades, especially in the use of "imagic and visual coding", "using dictionary for word learning", "associating" and "selective noticing"; English majors outperformed Non-English majors in the use of 17 strategies, and the difference between them in utilizing "using textual knowledge and background information" and "using dictionary for word learning" is significant, while Non-English majors have been more frequently using "oral repetition" and "visual repetition", which seems to suggest that they are more willing to use rote memorization like "memorizing wordlists".
- (3) The undergraduates' strategy use correlates with their vocabulary sizes, and the 4 strategies that significantly correlate with vocabulary sizes are "using dictionary for word learning", "noting down usage", "visual repeating" and "trying using". A significant negative correlation exists between "visual repeating" and vocabulary size, which proves that the training of using vocabulary learning strategies must be emphasized to enlarge learners' vocabulary size. Meanwhile, teachers had better encourage learners to utilize appropriate strategies in vocabulary learning to develop the width and depth of their vocabulary knowledge, achieve more effective elaboration and establish better connection of the vocabulary knowledge in the long-term memory (mental lexicon) for activation and later retrieval.
- (4) The major problems have been found in the undergraduates' FL vocabulary development: A. Learners' vocabulary size, which is much smaller than what the syllabus requires, restricts their FL learning; B. A serious imbalance exists between productive and receptive vocabulary sizes with the ratio of 1: 3, which is far away from some researchers' viewpoint that SL/FL learners' productive vocabulary size needs to be about 1/2 of their receptive vocabulary size (Aitchison, 1987; Clark, 1993, etc.); C. The average condition of using vocabulary learning strategies is unsatisfactory with only 3 strategies well used; D. Known from the interviews, most of the undergraduates are accustomed to using traditional methods (focusing on rote memorization) in vocabulary learning without knowing or trying some other methods supported by modern computer and network technologies, which influences their vocabulary development.

#### 4.2 Discussions

Based on the findings (especially the problems) listed above, we are able to offer our risky solutions to the problems:

- (1) Both teachers and learners need to be aware of the importance of vocabulary in FL learning, and try their best to enlarge learners' vocabulary size;
- (2) Focus on both receptive and productive vocabulary sizes, and specially emphasize developing learners' productive vocabulary by doing vocabulary productive training, that is in fact try to use the target words in oral and written communicative contexts. By using the target words in authentic contexts, learners, on the one hand, can acquire the conceptual, phonetic and syntactic knowledge and information of the target words, and on the other hand, can obtain more elaborated processing of the word knowledge, establish better network of word knowledge connections and consequently enhance the vocabulary retention effects, which is in fact the essence of "learning in using".
- (3) Teachers need to encourage the learners to collect those vocabulary learning strategies proved to be effective, and learn to select and use certain learning strategies according to their own cognitive styles or personal preferences. Meanwhile, learners should keep reflecting on their strategy selecting and using to make themselves effective learners.
- (4) FL vocabulary learning is a time-consuming and difficult process, and psychologically, learners must have the preparation and determination to win this long-lasting battle; practically, they need to use more methods to learn vocabulary, including the direct (intentional) learning method well used by most Chinese learners, and the incidental (indirect) vocabulary acquisition most effectively used by native speakers. Combing these two approaches may probably lead to better learning results.

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Table 1. Dimensions, types and items

Dimensions	Types	Variables	Items
Perspectives		2	6
Meta-cognitive strategies		2	6
	Initial treatment	Guessing	2
		Dictionary using	3
		Note taking	2
Cognitive strategies	Reinforcement	Repeating	3
		Coding	6
	Try using		1
Total		21	60

Table 2. Descriptives of the variables

No.	Variable Description		Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Perspective	Learning words by rote memorization	1.00	4.67	2.7515	.77879
2		Learning words by using	1.33	5.00	4.0684	.72371
3	Meta-cognitive strategies	Selective noticing	1.00	5.00	3.1779	.72659
4		Active learning	1.00	5.00	3.3937	.86688
5	Cognitive strategies	Using background and textual information	1.00	5.00	3.5141	.81903
6		Using local linguistic information	1.00	5.00	3.4329	.79688
7		Using dictionary for meaning comprehension	1.33	5.00	3.7662	.79808
8		Using dictionary for word learning	1.33	5.00	3.7369	.85165
9		Dictionary-using strategy	1.00	5.00	3.1619	.80039
10		Noting down meaning	1.00	5.00	3.3979	.94881
11		Noting down usage	1.00	5.00	3.4043	.89108
12		Using word-lists	1.00	5.00	2.6424	.88296
13		Oral repeating	1.00	5.00	2.9591	.96314
14		Visual repeating	1.00	5.00	2.6915	.93625
15		associating	1.00	5.00	2.9216	.85010
16		Imagic and visual coding	1.00	5.00	2.3927	.94928
17		Auditory coding	1.00	5.00	3.0987	.85770
18		Using word formation (stems and affixes)	1.00	5.00	2.9275	.93409
19		Meaning-focused coding	1.00	5.00	2.7116	.83915
20		Context-focused coding	1.00	5.00	3.1204	.85031
21		Trying using	1.00	5.00	3.1862	.83524
22	Vocabulary sizes	Receptive vocabulary size	2.00	30.00	16.1937	6.93573
23		Productive vocabulary size	0.00	13.00	5.3874	2.57450

Table 3. Comparison between male and female subjects' perspective and strategy use

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Male	2.84	3.97	3.13	3.53	3.47	3.29	3.84	3.65	3.23	3.60
Female	2.71	4.11	3.20	3.33	3.53	3.50	3.74	3.77	3.13	3.51
t	1.082	-1.212	-.581	1.453	-.442	-1.661	.791	-.921	.743	.768
Sig.	.281	.227	.563	.148	.659	.098	.430	.358	.459	.402
<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
3.36	2.67	2.93	2.76	2.78	2.31	3.08	2.94	2.72	3.05	3.24
3.42	2.63	2.97	2.66	2.98	2.43	3.11	2.92	2.71	3.15	3.16
-.417	.305	-.299	.640	-1.466	-.811	-.239	.074	.141	-.777	.568
.677	.761	.765	.523	.144	.418	.812	.942	.888	.438	.570

Table 4. Comparison between different graders' perspective and strategy use

Variable	(I) GRADE	(J) GRADE	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error Difference	Sig.
Selective noticing	3	2	-.05954	.11167	.855
		4	-.39982(*)	.16335	.040
Using dictionary for word learning	2	3	.13702	.12922	.540
		4	-.49320(*)	.19062	.028
	3	2	-.13702	.12922	.540
		4	-.63022(*)	.18903	.003
Visual repeating	3	2	.08130	.14392	.839
		4	.51307(*)	.21053	.041
Associating	2	3	-.23896	.12951	.158
		4	-.56613(*)	.19104	.010
Imagic and visual coding	2	3	-.48043(*)	.14210	.003
		4	-.69450(*)	.20961	.003
	3	2	.48043(*)	.14210	.003
		4	-.21407	.20786	.559

Table 5. Comparison between English and Non-English majors' perspective and strategy use

Variable description	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Learning words by rote memorization	-.137	.891	-.01552	.11356
Learning words by using	.165	.869	.01745	.10552
Selective noticing	1.398	.164	.14733	.10541
Active learning	1.400	.163	.17609	.12576
Using background and textual information	2.094	.038	.24729	.11807
Using local linguistic information	.468	.641	.05431	.11613
Using dictionary for meaning comprehension	1.006	.316	.11679	.11607
Using dictionary for word learning	2.544	.012	.31072	.12211
Dictionary-using strategy	.843	.400	.09819	.11649
Noting down meaning	.958	.339	.13220	.13802
Noting down usage	.096	.924	.01246	.12993
Using word-lists	.258	.796	.03326	.12873
Oral repeating	-.479	.632	-.06728	.14036
Visual repeating	-1.018	.310	-.13863	.13615
associating	.869	.386	.10756	.12371
Imagic and visual coding	.449	.654	.06206	.13835
Auditory coding	.163	.871	.02035	.12506
Using word formation (stems and affixes)	.847	.398	.11515	.13595
Meaning-focused coding	.846	.399	.10333	.12213
Context-focused coding	1.606	.110	.19780	.12316
Trying using	1.052	.294	.12778	.12144

Table 6. Comparison between subjects' receptive and productive vocabulary sizes

		Paired Differences					t	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	REC - PRO	1295.53	9.024	1.648	1292.16	1298.90	786.3 53	.000

Table 7. Correlation between strategy use and vocabulary size

Variable		Receptive vocabulary size	Productive vocabulary size
Using dictionary for word learning	Pearson Correlation	.179(*)	.156(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.031
	N	481	481
Noting down usage	Pearson Correlation	.168(*)	.163(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.024
	N	481	481
Visual repeating	Pearson Correlation	-.163(*)	-.196(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.007
	N	481	481
Trying using	Pearson Correlation	.158(*)	.166(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.022
	N	481	481
Receptive vocabulary size	Pearson Correlation	1	.938(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	481	481
Productive vocabulary size	Pearson Correlation	.938(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	481	481

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



## Using L1 in Teaching Vocabulary to Low English Proficiency Level Students: A Case Study at the National University of Laos

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### Abstract

Many English professionals do not seem to pay much attention to the use of L1 in English language classrooms, based on the tenets that English should be taught in English to expose the learners to English which would enhance their knowledge of English and accelerate their learning. While research findings have been inconsistent in relation to this position, the results of the present study found evidence to the contrary. Using 169 students of a low proficiency level, it was found that using learners' mother tongue (L1) to teach English as a foreign language in Laos enhanced their retention of new vocabulary items both in isolation and in context. This is possibly due to clear definitions and explanations in L1, dictation quiz and translation exercises in the classroom. This would have implications for English professionals.

**Keywords:** Mother tongue (L1), Teaching vocabulary, Low proficiency level, Dictation, Translation

### 1. Introduction

Many English language teaching professionals dispute the L1 use in the classroom, something that should never happen in today's modern, communicative lessons. They wonder how students can truly appreciate target language exchanges if they are continually relying on their L1s (Mattioli, 2004). Ellis notes that too much L1 use could "deprive the learners of valuable input in the L2" (1984, p. 133). Auerbach (1993) observes that in ESL classroom a numbers of teachers, holding the belief that L1 use will impede progress in the acquisition of English, devising games, signals, and penalty systems to prevent the students from using their L1. This is evidenced by the article of Weinberg (1990), extolling the virtues of fining students for using their L1. "This is an English-only classroom. If you speak Spanish or Cantonese or Mandarin or Vietnamese or Russian or Farsi, you pay me 25 cents. I can be rich." (p. 5). Several authors suggest that L1 does not play an essential role in foreign language teaching (Tang, 2002). Whilst Nation (1990), for example, suggests that the degradation of mother tongue has a harmful psychological effect on learners. Atkinson (1987) not only acknowledges the positive role of the mother tongue in the classroom, but also identifies the following uses of it: eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instructions, enhancing co-operation among learners, promoting discussions of classroom methodology, improving presentation and reinforcement of language, checking for sense, testing, and development of useful learning strategies. The following are several reasons why the L1 should be used as a tool in the language classroom:

- it is more natural to use the L1 with others who have the same L1
- it is easier and more communicatively effective to use the L1
- using L2 can be a source of embarrassment particularly for shy learners and those who feel they are not very proficient in the L2
- L1 can help to move the task along by establishing a joint understanding of the text and to manage the task
- L1 allows learners to focus attention on vocabulary and grammatical items (e.g., searching for vocabulary items or providing information and explanation about grammatical rules and conventions)
- L1 may facilitate classroom activities, particularly for low proficiency students and complex tasks
- L1 can provide a foundation for learners on which to build L2 structures, especially during collective activities in the classroom, and

- L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' live experiences, allowing them to express themselves (Nation, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Atkinson, 1987; Wells, 1999; and Schweers, 1999).

Many professionals in the field of second language and foreign language acquisition agree that L1 should be used with students who are not highly proficient in the target language (Nation, 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Atkinson, 1987; Tang, 2002; Auerbach, 1993; Mattioli, 2004). This may suggest that L1 plays an important role in language teaching, especially for the low proficiency learners (LPL).

However, there are not many empirical studies that have examined whether or not L1 is an effective tool for teaching LPL. A recent study by Ramachandran and Rahim (2004) investigated the effectiveness of using the translation method in recalling the meaning and retention of the words with elementary level ESL. Their results indicated that the translation method through using L1 was more effective than the non-translation method in enhancing ESL learners' vocabulary learning ability, and it could improve elementary ESL learner's ability to recall the meaning of the word learnt.

Based on the above, it seems necessary to look at the approaches for vocabulary teaching. Sökmen (1997) states that vocabulary teaching was based on a top-down, naturalistic, and communicative approach which emphasized implicit and incidental learning of vocabulary. Inferring from the context and guessing are considered to be implicit teaching. The implicit approach is commonly used in foreign language teaching classrooms. Teachers often encourage students to guess the meaning of the word by looking at the context where the words are located. They rarely use L1 in the classroom because they are concerned that students may just rely on their L1. Whilst, more studies show that implicit teaching may not be appropriate for LPL, it could cause more difficulties in the process of learning.

Several studies of vocabulary acquisition show that the combination of implicit and explicit vocabulary instruction is an effective way for acquiring vocabulary (Sökmen, 1997). Ramachandran and Rahim's (2004) study shows that explicit instruction which uses L1 could encourage ESL students whose English proficiency is at the elementary level to recall and retain the words more effectively.

Whilst L1 is overlooked in our institution (Department of English, Faculty of Letters, National University of Laos), where English is taught as a foreign language, it seems that many teachers believe that English should be taught in English because it is the only way to expose students to the target language in the classroom. The results of recent studies in our institution show that students from the first to the final year had a fairly low achievement level. Keomany (2006) reported that first year students could not make any progress outside the scheduled academic year. He concluded that they had such a low achievement because the teachers taught English in English. They gave the meaning of the words and the explanation in English as suggested by Weinberg (1990). Even students in the final year had difficulty with basic vocabulary items in the level of 1-1.000 in the *General Service List of English Words* (GSL) by West (1953). Such students had similar achievement as the first year students (Soulinavong, 2007).

The reason we are focusing on vocabulary acquisition is that the acquisition of vocabulary has a central role in learning a second language (Sökmen, 1997). Another claim is that second language learners need to have a substantial vocabulary size (Nation, 2001). Cook (1991) argues that vocabulary learning is essential for the four language skills. The study of Ringbom in 1987 clearly indicates that L1 clearly has a very important role to play in the deliberative learning vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Auerbach (1993) claims that the use of the learner's L1 in the L2 classroom will have a positive effect on learners' second language learning, especially in the area of vocabulary.

This study, inspired by their research, aims to address the problem of low achievement in our institution, which investigated the effectiveness of using L1 in teaching vocabulary (using Lao Language for giving meaning, explanation, and translation exercises from Lao to English vice versa, dictation quiz).

## 2. Research design

This study aimed at answering the following question:

1. Does the L1 help increase students' achievement in vocabulary?

### 2.1 Participants

Four classes (n = 169) of first year English majors attending a university in Laos participated in this study. Two classes (n = 86) were assigned as an experimental group and the other two classes (n = 83) were assigned as a control group. The experimental group received L1 in vocabulary instruction while the control group did not receive any treatment. The mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the pretest were 9.9 and 10.8, respectively. The results of t-test analysis showed no significant differences between the two groups.

### 2.2 Instrumentation

Three types of instruction were employed in this study, namely, testing materials (pretest & posttest), teaching instrumentations and teaching techniques.

### 2.2.1 Testing materials: Pretest & Posttest

Both the pretest and posttest had the same format: multiple choice tests with four alternative answers. The test consisted of two parts: (1) vocabulary in direct translation from English to Lao (to check student recall and retention of the words) (10 items), and (2) vocabulary in context (5 items). In the pretest, all 15 words were taken from GSL (West, 1953), which is in the level of 1-1.000. In the posttest, the words were taken from the teaching materials in the Language Practice (LP) classes, which both groups had learnt in the academic year 2006-2007. All words are in the level of 1-1.000 of GSL. The Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of both tests. It was proved that both tests were reliable in the level of .86 and .80, respectively.

### 2.2.2 Teaching Materials

The new words are in 12 units of the General English (GE) (Souvannasy et al., 2006), which was used with the experimental group. The words appeared in the context, and on a word list with Lao translation and parts of speech at the end of each unit. The New Headway Elementary (NHE) (Soars & Soars, 2000) was used with the control group, which has the word list at the end of the unit with the part of speech, but there is no definition given.

### 2.2.3 Teaching Techniques

The new words were introduced in an easy context with L1 definitions and explanations, and a quiz/small test was used to check student understanding and whether they could remember the words or not. The oral translation or dictation quiz took place at the beginning of every class. This was used to check whether the students could remember the words, which they have learnt in the previous lesson. The tests are the translation sentences or words from Lao to English or English to Lao, which were normally at the end of each unit. However, with the control group, the teachers normally gave the definitions and explanation in English. There had no dictation and translation exercises for each unit. Most practice of using the words were based on their textbook (NHE).

## 3. Results and Discussion

Students in the experimental group which applied L1 in teaching new words outperformed those in the control group in both vocabulary in direct translation and vocabulary in context. Student achievement for each part of the test was investigated by comparing the mean scores of the two groups by using MANOVA. There was a significant difference in the achievement at the level of  $p < .001$ .

### 3.1. Direct translation

The students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. The difference in the mean scores of the groups was significantly different at the level of  $p < .001$  as shown in Table 1. The posttest achievement by item showed that the rates of right answers in the ten items were higher in the experimental group. Seven items out of 10 items were over 90% in the experimental group. On the other hand, the rates of right answer for all items in this part were less than 90% in the control group. Figure 1 shows the percentage of right answer by item in the direct translation part. Table 2 shows the frequency of the appearance of the words in the direct translation parts in both NHE and GE.

There are two possible explanations for the achievement of the experimental group. First, all words were assigned definitions and explanations in L1 (Lao). This might help students to understand the meaning of the words clearly. On the other hand, in the control classes, teachers were expected to explain the words in English and not to give equivalent words in L1. So, in the control class, even though the teachers could recognize new words and explained them, it was difficult for students to understand the meaning of the words. Second, in the experimental group, students were required to memorize new words in every class, and there was a vocabulary quiz/test in every class. In each class before starting a lesson, the teacher reviewed the words, which the students had learned in the scheduled period through either oral translation or dictation. This kind of test is a very good tool to motivate students. Repeated vocabulary tests pushed students to memorize words. In general, the above two reasons were deemed to be the most essential, and they have implications for vocabulary acquisition.

#### 3.1.1 Clear definition and explanation in L1 (Lao)

Some people believe that with frequent exposure, students can acquire vocabulary naturally. Kachroo (1962; cited in Nation, 1990) found that words that occurred seven or more times in the course book were known by most of his Indian learners; and Salling (1959) (ibid) found that at least five times of repetitions were needed to ensure learning. Crothers and Suppes (1967) (ibid) also found that six or seven times occurrences to be necessary for learning. Later Saragi et al. (1978) found that 16 or more repetitions were necessary (ibid).

An example from "Q8 *country*" did not support this. Frequent exposure sometimes resulted in natural acquisition, but sometimes in widespread misunderstandings of the word.

The rate of right answers for the experimental group was 85.9%, while for the control group it was 77.0% as shown in Table 3. The word in Table 2 appeared 77 times in NHE. However, 23.0% was distributed in option "(a) *city*", "(b)

world", "(c) capital" and "No answer" (11.5%, 3.3%, 4.9% and 3.3%, respectively). This indicates that the frequency of the appearance could not always help students to acquire the word. Why about 11% of the students in both groups chose "(a) city" as the right answer can be explained as follows: in the GE, "country" appeared for the first time in an exercise for translation of "My country is small." Teachers tended to be less careful in explaining words in exercises than words in the leading text. If the students made a mistake at the first appearance, it would be difficult to correct their misunderstanding. However, the reason why about 11% of students taught with NHE confused "country" with "city" was difficult to explain. In NHE the word "country" was introduced for the first time in a gap filling test on page 12 (Unit 2); later it was introduced in an easy context on page 50 (Unit 6) ('Operator: International Directory Enquiries. Which country, please?' 'You: Australia'); it appeared again in a more complex context as on page 57 (Unit 7) "When the war ended in 1781 he was happy to go back to the farm, but his country wanted him to be President." In addition to its meaning "nation", another meaning of the word "country" such as "any area outside towns and cities, with fields, woods, farms, etc." was also introduced (Unit 10, pp. 74-75 & 80-81). In Unit 10, students in the control group were expected to compare between life in city and country ("The country is safer than the city." "Life in the country is slower than city life."). Though the students in the control group had more opportunities to learn the meanings of the word than those in the experimental group, they were still confused in choosing the right meaning for the word. This might be due to teachers in the control group explaining and giving instructions mainly in English, which could cause more difficulty for the students who had not yet mastered the basic vocabulary in the range of 1-1.000. Therefore, a number of the students in the control group confused the meaning of "country" with "city".

In brief, the results may lead one to conclude that in order to prevent the misunderstanding of the meaning of the new word; teachers should provide clear, simple, brief explanations of meaning, especially in the learners' first language. Nation (2001) suggests that it is important to start the process of learning in a clear way without confusion when first meeting a word. By doing so, it is better to do in L1 (Lado, Baldwin & Lobo, 1967; Mishima, 1967, cited in Nation, 2001; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997). Also teachers can help learners by clearly signaling the definition they provide, by testing learners' ability to diagnose their recognition and interpretation of definitions, and by providing training in recognizing and interpreting definition (Nation, 2001).

### 3.1.2 Frequent appearance after clear explanation reinforce memorization

The rate of right answer of the "Q10 support" for the experimental group was 98.4% as shown in Table 4; second highest after "possible". Only 1.6% of students chose option "(b) care", and no students chose "(a) smile" and "(d) understand". This might be because the word *support* appeared 17 times in GE as shown in Table 2. It appeared first in Unit 7 "My parents always support us and encourage us." with Lao translation and explanation. In the same unit, *support* as a verb, *support* as a noun and the noun *supporter* were introduced with examples and explanations, and repeated again in other units. This might suggest that after introducing a word with clear explanation, its frequent appearance helps students remember and ultimately memorize it.

However, "possible" and "history" which were the first and third items in the rate of right answer appeared in GE only three times and four times, respectively. This might suggest that the effect of frequency could be smaller than that of clear explanation in Lao, appearance in a simple and clear context, and memorization under the pressure of testing.

In the control group too, the rate of the right answer of "support" that appeared only once in NHE was the same as that of "country" that appeared 77 times (77.0%). This supports frequent appearance is preferable, but explanation and example are much more important.

### 3.2 Vocabulary in context

The result of vocabulary in the context suggested that the students in the control group had more difficulties in understanding the meaning of basic vocabulary (GSL 1-1.000) in a sentence than those in the experimental group. There was a significant difference between the experimental group and control group at the level of  $p < .05$  by MANOVA (Table 1). The standardize score (T-score) was used to compare the mean scores. This is because the five items in the vocabulary-in-context part in the posttest are more difficult than those of the pretest as shown by the mean scores of 55 first year students who took both pretest and posttest at the same time. These tests are the same tests, which were used to measure the achievement of the students in both experimental and control groups. This is to check the equivalence of the two tests. The mean score of 55 students decreased from 3.3 in the pretest to 2.6 in the posttest while the standard deviation of pretest and posttest was slightly different (1.4 and 1.5, respectively).

In general, the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group, except on item "Q15 company". It should be noted that the word "especially" was not taught in GE and the word "trouble" was not taught in NHE, as shown in Table 5. Figure 2 shows the rate of right answer for each item.

There are several possible reasons why the experimental group had higher achievement than the control group. First, as seen in the part of direct translation, students in the experimental group had acquired more words more clearly. The part of word in context requires students to know most words in the given sentences (context) to guess the right answers.

Understanding of vocabulary makes a difference. Second, students in the experimental group could acquire the skill of using a word in different context. For example, in “Q12 *say*” as shown in Table 6, 18.0% of the students in control group chose “Please help it again”, instead of “Please say it again”. The students might only notice the sentence “Please help it again.” in the textbook, but they did not know that two words “help” and “say” can be used in contexts and that the word “help” needs an object “help somebody”, like “Please help me”. Finally, students in the experimental group seemed to have the skill or attitude of reading the whole sentence and guessing the right answer. This could be seen from the fact that the rate of no answer was higher in the control group in all five items as shown in Table 8. In “Q13 *quiet*” as shown in Table 7, 74.6% of students in the experimental group could reach the right answer “quiet” by reading the next sentence “He does not talk much”, but in the control group, those students who could do it was just 47.5%.

As was discussed in the previous part, it is important to clarify the second and third points in terms of how in GE, students could know the use of the words and acquired the skill and attitude of reading the whole text.

How students in the experimental group could learn the use of the word could be explained by the following reasons: the teaching of sentence pattern and functions from the beginning, and the exercise of translation from Lao to English. The first possible reason was that from Unit 1, students in the experimental group were familiar with the sentence structure. Subject + Verb + Object form first appeared in Unit 3, and was taught repeatedly. The sentence in Unit 9 on page 84 “They always say that study abroad is easy.” appeared as an example that “that clause” can be an object of the main verb. Also, an example in Unit 10, “How do you say (Lao word) in English.” attracts students’ attention that the Lao word is the object of the sentence. These examples helped students to understand that “say” takes something as an object. “Help” first appeared in Unit 7 “May I help you?” in GE. It appeared frequently like “Your assistant helps you.” (Unit 7). These examples made students aware that “help” takes somebody as an object. These examples appeared repeatedly in the exercise from Lao to English translation. Students could reinforce the use of the words in the exercise. On the other hand, in NHE, there is no explanation on the sentence pattern and function of the words. The examples are also unclear because all that follow “say” are direct speech, such as “He says: ‘Margaret likes being busy, too. ...’” (page 25 of Unit 3), in “He says ‘I’m shy, but I love giving concerts.’ He says: ‘Mozart was poor and he couldn’t play football, so I’m not like him at all!’” (Unit 6 on page 48)..., etc. In these examples, it is difficult for students to guess that the speech is the object of “say”. For “help”, there are three examples: “He helps in the shop.” (page 24 and 25 of Unit 3), “Then he helps Margaret in the shop.” (page 24 and 25 of Unit 3) and one more sentence is in the workbook of the same unit on page 15 “She helps sick people.” The latter two examples have somebody as an object. However, if students were not aware of the sentence pattern and function of object, it was probable that they did not care much about it.

The reason why the students taught in GE could develop attitude of reading the whole sentence can be explained by the exercise it required. Both oral and written exercises in GE require the students to translate the sentences in the exercises from Lao to English and from English to Lao. Through these exercises, especially exercise of English to Lao translation, students were trained to read the whole text. The translation practice from L1 to L2 and vice versa need not only be a means of internalizing new L2 words. Translation may also be used as a mean of improving skill in the combined use of lexical, syntactic and textual levels (van Els et al., 1984). On the other hand, students in the control group were not given the chance to read the whole text word by word. This could give rise to differences in the attitude of the students.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study makes an important contribution to English Foreign Language Teaching, particularly in the area of vocabulary for students with a lower proficiency level. This study shows the effectiveness of using L1 in teaching vocabulary through translation exercises and dictation. The findings indicate that the experimental group achieved significantly better performance in both vocabulary in direct translation and vocabulary in context. These results could provide empirical support for the application of L1 in the foreign language classroom. Also checking student understanding by quiz/small test frequently or in other words, applying the technique called teach-and-test (Nation, 1990) - to teach English language help the students in the experimental group to learn better than the control group.

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Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Pretest and Posttest

Test		Experimental group		Control group		P**
Parts (no. of items)		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Direct translation (10)	Pre	6.9	2.6	7.8	2.0	< .001
	Post	9.2	1.3	8.1	2.3	
Context (5)	Pre	48.3	11.7	47.6	12.9	< .05
	Post	52.9	9.4	47.0	10.2	

Note: \* Vocabulary in context, the score is T score; \*\* p-value by MANOVA.

Table 2. Frequency of the Appearance of the Direct Translation Words in NHE and GE

Items	Words	NHE (times)	GE (times)
5	possible	3	3
10	support	1	17
9	history	9	4
7	early	12	24
3	begin	11	6
6	face	6	10
4	leave	18	9
1	become	4	8
8	country	77	10
2	thing	52	7

Table 3. *Rate of Answer in “Q8 country”*

8. country	(a) (city)	(b) (world)	(c) (capital)	(d) (country)
Group	a	b	c	d*
Experimental	11.1%	0.0%	3.2%	<b>85.9%</b>
Control	11.5%	3.3%	4.9%	<b>77.0%</b>

\* Right answer

Note: The italic word in the parentheses (.....) are in Lao language

Table 4. *Rate of Answer in “Q10 support”*

10. support	(a)(smile)	(b) (support)	(c) (care)	(d) (understand)
Group	a	b*	c	d
Experimental	0.0%	<b>98.4%</b>	1.6%	0.0%
Control	0.0%	<b>77.0%</b>	1.6%	6.6%

\* Right answer

Note: The italic word in the parentheses (.....) are in Lao language

Table 5. *Frequency of the Appearance of the Words in Context in NHE and GE*

Items	Words	NHE(times)	GE (times)
11	trouble	-	18
14	especially	4	-
13	quiet	6	15
12	say	32	11
15	company	3	1

Table 6. *Rate of Answer in “Q12 say”*

12. It is not very clear. Please ( ) it again.				
(a) help	(b) remember	(c) say	(d) spend	
Group	a	b	c*	d
Experimental	6.3%	4.8%	<b>88.5%</b>	4.8%
Control	18.0%	9.8%	<b>49.2%</b>	4.9%

\* Right answer

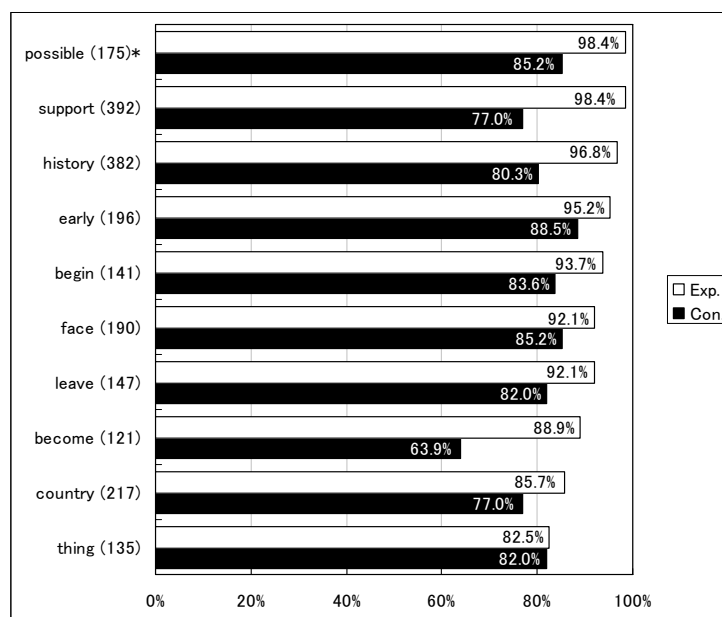
Table 7. *Rate of Answer in “Q13 quiet”*

13. Khambane is ( ). He does not talk much.				
(a) old	(b) quiet	(c) early	(d) fair	
Group	a	b*	c	d
Experimental	12.7%	<b>74.6%</b>	4.8%	3.2%
Control	26.2%	<b>47.5%</b>	9.8%	6.6%

\* Right answer

Table 8. *Rate of No Answer*

Items	Words	Experimental	Control
11	trouble	7.9%	11.5%
14	especially	1.6%	18.0%
13	quiet	4.2%	9.8%
12	say	3.2%	3.3%
15	company	1.6%	9.8%



Note: \* number in the bracket is the range of the word in GSL.

Figure 1. Percentage of Right Answer in Direct Translation

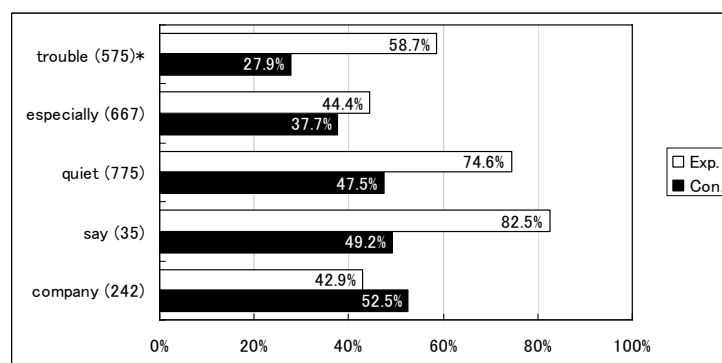


Figure 2. Achievement Item by Item in Vocabulary in Context



## An Experimental Study of the Effects of Listening on Speaking for College Students

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### Abstract

As China enters WTO, more college graduates with higher oral English proficiency are required. However, we learned that even students in some distinguished universities are lack of this ability. Based on her teaching experiences and the theory proposed by Krashen and some other well-know foreign languages teaching researchers, the author of this thesis formulated two hypotheses: 1) Students' listening ability and their oral English production ability are correlated. 2) Teachers who bring listening and audio-visual materials into oral English class are likely to have better teaching results.

Krashen's Comprehensive Input Hypothesis is the theoretical foundation of the author's research. The author studies the nature of listening and speaking, by doing so she points out the effects of listening on improving students' oral English from two broad aspects.

This thesis aims at making a quantitative analysis on the effects of listening on speaking for college students. With the help of SPSS 11.5 software, a quantitative computerized analysis on this research hypothesis is made. Moreover, a quantitative analysis on correlation between listening and speaking is also made.

The result shows that listening and speaking ability are closely related, and listening does have positive effects on improving college students' oral English.

**Keywords:** Listening, Authentic, Oral English

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

As China enters WTO, as international relationships become closer, as unions and partnerships across nations become more widespread, an increasing number of jobs are likely to require a person not only to be good at his specialty, but also to acquire higher proficiency in oral English.

What affects an employee's ability to communicate effectively the most in a multinational company environment is oral English ability. For about 90 percent of the job openings we see in China, oral English (at a business level) is a must, with strong reading and writing abilities preferred. These positions usually require candidates to interface often with international managers as well as communicate updates and information to China-based and home office senior management. Beyond just speaking, candidates must be able to express themselves accurately and clearly.

In spite of the fact that English language courses are required in colleges and universities, the students' oral English ability is far from satisfying. The possible reason for such embarrassing cases might be that students who have good command of English in reading and writing might not be good enough at speaking in English. Students may be qualified in reading or writing some English materials, but might fail in oral English communication. For college English teachers, there is a must to at least partly solve this problem. Luckily, nowadays, most of them have realized this problem and some of them tried possible ways to improve students' oral English. These tentative reforms in teaching have undoubtedly positive effects on improving students oral production ability, however, in the writer's view, those methods in oral English teaching could not be the panacea for all students at college levels, and they may not work for students whose English proficiency level is either too high or too low. Such being the case, some students who have lower or higher proficiency level might suffer from the courses rather than improve their oral English.

#### 1.2 Significance of the study

The significance of this study is two- fold. From the research perspective, although listening has been widely used in oral English classes, it just has been used for imitation, but not been seen as a way to make students' oral English more authentic. This study might provide some insight into the research in this field; from the teaching perspective, the findings of this study might promote the effectiveness of listening on oral English teaching and learning, hence promoting the college English reform in our country.

#### 1.3 Research questions and hypotheses

The central purpose of this study is to verify the truth that listening some appropriate English materials has some effects

on improving students' oral English. This study draws on insight from listening and speaking classes of two parallel classes, and it is hoped that this tentative study might shed some light on further research in this field.

Research shows that listening has proved to be a very effective tool to improve students' oral English in oral English teaching. A tentative proposal is put forward to compare the students' results of the final test in two parallel classes (one is experimental class, the other is control class) and investigate whether listening has some effects to make students' oral English more authentic. The following hypotheses are therefore formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Students' listening comprehension ability and their oral English ability are correlated.

Hypothesis 2: Since listening has some positive effects on improving students' oral English ability, teachers who bring listening and audio-visual materials into their oral English class are likely to have better teaching results

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1981a; 1982) and Long (1983b; 1983c) have argued strongly that SLA is dependent on the availability of comprehensible input before the learners' internal processing mechanism can work.

Krashen presents the case for comprehensible input in the form of the input hypothesis. He argues that for SLA to take place, the learner needs input that contains exemplars of the language forms which according to the natural order are due to be acquired next. Input must consist of 'i+1'. Krashen (1982:21) writes:

... a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage 'i' to stage 'i+1', where 'understand' means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not on the form of the message.

Thus acquisition takes place when the learner understands language containing 'i +1'. This will automatically occur when communication is successful. Krashen emphasizes that input does not need to be 'finely tuned' in the sense that it is linguistically adjusted to contain 'i+1'. It requires only rough tuning, which is automatic if the focus is on successful communication. Krashen talks of the input 'casting a net' in order to make certain that it is of an optimal size, providing a build-in review of language forms already acquired that the focus is on meaning and not form.

Long (1983 c) considers in some detail how input is made comprehensible. One way is by the use of structures and vocabulary which the learner already knows. However, this type of input cannot foster development, because it supplies no new linguistic material. Another way is by a 'here-and-now' orientation, which enables the learner to make use of the linguistic and extra linguistic contexts and his general knowledge to interpret language which he does not actually know. A third way is through the modification of the interactional structure of conversation. Long considers interactional adjustments to be the important ones for SLA and points out that these occur even when there are no formal modifications. A 'here-and-now' orientation, together with interactional adjustments, are the main source of comprehensible input. They ensure that communication proceeds, which exposing the learner to new linguistic material.

Krashen brings listening-based methods together through the notion of 'comprehensible input'. He claims that 'acquisition' can take place only when people understand messages in the 'target language' (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). Listening is motivated by the need to get messages out of what is heard. Foreign language learner acquires a new language by hearing in contexts where the meaning is made plain to them. Ideally the speech they hear has enough 'old' language that the student already knows and makes enough sense in the context for the new language to be understood and absorbed. How the teacher gets the message across is not particularly important.

Krashen claims that all teaching methods that work utilize the 'fundamental pedagogical principle' of providing comprehensible input: "if X is shown to be 'good' for acquiring a second language, X helps to provide CI (Comprehensible Input), either directly or indirectly. (Krashen, 1981b) Krashen's code breaking approach to listening became a strong influence on language teachers in the 1980s. It is saying essentially that L2 acquisition depends on listening: decoding is code breaking. It did not, however, lead to a generation of published listening-based main course books.

### 2.2 Present oral English teaching situations in colleges

As more and more emphasis has been given to students' communicative competence, therefore textbooks have designed to cater to this need. Take New Horizon College English and New college English for example, there is an additional textbook on listening and speaking for New Horizon College English which, according to the editors, should spent at least two hours for each unit. In classrooms, students usually take task-based assignment, for example, group discussion on certain topics, role-play or pair work as to fulfilling some designed tasks, individual presentation to deliver a public speech, and so on. In New College English, students will meet listening and speaking section before they begin intensive reading part, and at the end of each unit, there are group discussions and pair works concerning the central topic of a particular unit. As recommended by the editors, one third of the in-class time should be allocated to listening and speaking, and speaking should be the larger part. Because of the limitation of class time, students are often required

to continue their unfinished tasks as after-class assignment. However, in practice, many students fail to do this mainly due to their boredom to the stiff assignments.

Most of our college English teachers practice the instructions according to the syllabus of the textbooks being used. Two to three hours of oral practices mainly focus on the materials offered in the textbook. Little contextual alteration might have been made, because the teachers rely too much on the textbooks. They assume textbook is the best, at least is better than their own mind.

On the contrary, textbook materials are not necessarily suitable for all students at various levels of different majors. What is easy for computer science majors might appear tough for art students. Furthermore, some tasks seem too outdated to keep pace with the fast-developing society. Also in this kind of speaking class, the teacher is the only model-source, but who would ensure that he/she is qualified in speaking English if he/she is non-native English speaker. Owing to the above reasons and more, it's no doubt some problems may arise. Students show less interests and motivation in these materials, students are able to speak English, but actually Chinese-English in terms of pronunciation, intonation, cultural knowledge, which is far from authentic English, and might lead to communicative failure in some cases.

During the five-year teaching life, the author observed and examined many oral English classes given by teachers of different age groups. She found that they all have something in common: the teachers' main goal was to have students talk and interact, in the hope that through interaction and minimal interference from the teachers the students would practice the linguistic forms they had learned and entered into meaningful dialogue with one another. However, we have seen the important role that context played in the construction of meaning. By failing to take advantage of the full range of contextual possibilities, the teachers often unwittingly constrained classroom discourse to superficial, linguistic exchange, thus only partly achieving the goal they had set for themselves. Doing justice to the full context of the foreign language classroom raises interesting issues that require a new type of pedagogy.

### *2.3 Effects of listening on improving students' oral English*

#### *2.3.1 Listen to perfect students' pronunciation and intonation*

Views on teaching pronunciation have changed dramatically over the last half-century of language teaching. In the heyday of audio-lingualism and its various behavioristic methodological variants, the pronunciation component of a course in our program was a mainstay. Language was viewed as a hierarchy of related structures and at the base of this hierarchy was the articulation of phonemes and their contrasts within English and between English and native language. Oral English classes consisted of imitation drills, memorization of patterns, minimal pair exercises.

In the 1970s', as the language teaching profession began to experience a revolution of sorts, explicit pedagogical focus on anything that smacked of linguistic nuts and bolts was under siege by proponents of the various non-directive, "let-it-just-happen" approaches to language teaching. As we became more concerned with authenticity, real-world tasks, naturalness, non-directive teaching, and process, we became less concerned with the product: language itself. Pronunciation instruction became somewhat incidental to a course of study. It was not ignored entirely, but in the interest of promoting fluency-based instruction, accuracy-based focus on English phonology became, for many, an afterthought. By the mid 1980s', the cutting edge of the profession turned in a different direction. With greater attention to grammatical structures as important elements in discourse, to a balance between fluency and accuracy, and to the explicit specification of pedagogical tasks that a learner should accomplish, it became clear that pronunciation was a key to gaining full communicative competence. (Brown, 1994)

But the current approach to pronunciation starkly contrasts with the early approaches. Rather than attempting only to build a learner's articulatory competence from the bottom up, a top-down approach is taken in which the most relevant features of pronunciation—stress, rhythm, and intonation—are given high priority. Instead of teaching only the role of articulation within words, or at best, phrases, we teach its role in a whole stream of discourse. Rita Wong (1987:21) reminds us that:

...contemporary views (of language) hold that the sounds of language are less crucial for understanding than the way they are organized. The rhythm and intonation of English are two major organizing structures that native speakers rely on to process speech.... Because of their major roles in communication, rhythm and intonation merit greater priority in the teaching program than attention to individual sounds.

Wong's comments reflect an approach that puts all aspects of English pronunciation into the perspective of communicative, interactive, whole language view of human speech.

The most common problem among our English learners is that no matter how accurate the international phonetic alphabet may be, we cannot produce accurate pronunciation owing to the influence of "accent" of our native language. Because some English phones don't exist in our Chinese language at all, so it's quite natural for our students to find some similar sounds to replace the real one. It's quite common as we see in English consonants [r] [z] and so on.

Sometimes, this kind of Chinese ‘accent’ is understandable for beginner learners but for students of college levels, such errors need to be rectified in order to make their oral English more native-like. Since no Chinese phonetic equivalent exists for students to imitate, they should draw on authentic English listening materials. Since all the materials are read in native-English voice, by focusing their attention on the “right sound”, students can distinguish the nuance between ‘real’ pronunciation and Chinese ‘substitute’. Only by doing this as a first step, can students follow the second step of imitation.

Besides improving their pronunciation of words that are difficult to produce, perfecting the relevant features of pronunciation, i.e. stress, rhythm, and intonation is also a very important task for college students who aim at speaking more authentic native-like English. We know that stress, rhythm and intonation in the English language are quite different from those of Chinese, and we have been influenced by Chinese from the day we speak our first language. All the facts prove that it’s tough for Chinese learners of English to get rid of the influence of our mother tongue. In addition, different local accents might have various negative effects on students’ English stress, rhythm and intonation. Fortunately, college students have laid foundation of English study in middle school and have their own self-teaching ability, they can seek help from appropriate listening and audio-visual materials.

Owing to students’ age and their various innate phonetic abilities, imitation is not an easy task for some students at all. However, college students have their own advantages to capitalize on some benefits. For instance, they have clear and higher goals to keep motivating themselves through years of English learning; competitive English learning environment on campus make them pay more attention to their communicative ability; also with in and out of classroom helps from professional teachers, they can get more instructions and guide concerning their pronunciation in oral English; last but not least, college students can access to more authentic listening materials for imitation. Practice makes perfect. The more they listen, and the more they follow the native speakers, the greater progress they’ll make in improving their oral English.

### 2.3.2 Listen to develop cultural competence.

We have been concerned up to now with the ways in which speakers give meaning to utterances by shaping the context in which these utterances are produced and received. We have gone from the premise that meaning is not in the spoken text, but in the dialogue between the learner and the text. In both cases, social and personal voices intersect to create what Nostrand (1989:51) calls ‘the central code’ of a culture:

The central code consists not only of customs and proprieties; it involves above all the culture’s ‘ground of meaning’: its system of major values, habitual patterns of thought, and certain prevalent assumptions about human nature and society which the foreigner should be prepared to encounter.

The term ‘authentic’ has been used as a reaction against the prefabrication artificial language of textbooks and instructional dialogues; it refers to the way language is used in non- pedagogic, natural communication. As Little and Singleton (1988:21) point out ‘an authentic text is a text that was created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced.’ As spoken exchanges, authentic texts require participants to respond with behaviors that are socially appropriate to the setting, the status of the interlocutors, the purpose, key, genre, and instrumentalities of the exchange, and the norms of interaction agreed upon by native speakers.

Since Widdowson examined the concept of authentic text in 1979, it has been become a commonplace to say that authenticity does not lie in the text but in the uses speakers and readers make of it. As Widdowson wrote in 1979: ‘It is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/ hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker... Authenticity has to do with appropriate response.’ (Widdowson 1979:166)

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), the term ‘authentic’ has at least four meanings:

- 1) in accordance with a socially established usage or tradition (= from a duly authorized source);
- 2) entitled to acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with fact (= real, trustworthy);
- 3) the result of a recognizable communicative intention (= sincere, not supicious);
- 4) compatible with an identifiable, undisputed source or origin (= original, genuine).

Perhaps one of the main authentic activities within a language classroom is communication about how best to learn to communicate. Perhaps the most authentic language learning tasks are those which require the learner to undertake communication and metacommunication. Communicative approaches to language teaching, whether they be of the functional- notional type of the seventies or one of the proficiency orientations of the eighties, expose learners as much as possible to spoken or written texts that have not been fabricated for pedagogic purposes. It is hoped that, by making communication more authentic, learners will be able to better understand the speaking customs and ways of life of the target country, and thus behave more appropriately in native-speaker environments. (Kramsch, 1993)

What does the foreign language mean for the foreign language learner? Many things. For example, the obligation to adapt, to repeat the conventionally sanctioned phrases, to play a role, to identify. But it also means being able to compare one's own world of language with that of others, to broaden one's experience with language and language use, to insert some uncertainty into ways of speaking one had hitherto taken for granted; it means border crossing, blockade, disturbance-in sum, to use Humboldt's words, it means 'acquiring a new way of viewing the world.' (Hunfeld 1990:15)

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Overview of the design of the study

The studies at Qingdao University of Science and Technology show that there's a correlation between students' listening and speaking ability, from which the author drew the hypothesis that listening might have some effects on improving students' oral English. The use of TSE (Test of spoken English TOEFL) and Oral Proficiency Interview Scale are to assist in the decision of students' oral English ability. Yet till now little research in China has been conducted to test the effects of listening to improve students' oral English. In light of experiments of Qingdao University of Science and Technology, the author assumes that teachers who introduce listening to their oral English classes are likely to have better teaching results. After careful investigating the nature of TSE, we know that it can be used as the criterion in deciding on students' oral English ability. Thus, an empirical study has been conducted to test the truth of the hypothesis. This chapter intends to show the readers the methodology of the study, including the profile of the participants, the instruments, and the scoring procedures.

#### 3.2 Subjects

The study was carried out in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. The participants were all second-year students (n=50) of Computer Science majors who were grouped into two different groups. Group 1 is the control class, class 2 is the experimental class.

The majorities of class 2 students were interested in the 'listening' method and practiced it in their one-year English learning process. However, in the real practice, it was a little difficult to ensure that all of the students in class 2 practice the method seriously and persistently. Group 1 students still stick to the traditional methods in oral English class without the help of 'listening', which aims at making their oral English more authentic.

#### 3.3 Materials

##### 3.3.1 The TSE

TSE (Test of Spoken English) designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) was used in this study. The purpose of this test was to identify the oral English ability of the participants. The test is composed of 12 questions which fall into seven broad categories; namely, giving directions, recommending places, describing pictures, describing charts and graphs, presenting schedule changes, performing language functions and talking about topics. The participants are required to finish each task within limited time.

##### 3.3.2 The CET (Listening comprehension section)

CET(Band 4) Listening Comprehension Section, designed by the National College English Teaching Committee (the CET committee for short) is also used in this study, aiming at knowing students listening comprehension ability. The CET Listening section includes short conversations, passages and sometimes compound dictations.

#### 3.4 Design and procedure

##### 3.4.1 Design

At the beginning of the school year, the TSE and CET were conducted on different days within a one-week period and the CET came first. The participants' performance on the two tests was studied by means of descriptive analysis. The relationship between the participants' listening and speaking ability was also discussed by the correlation analysis.

##### 3.4.2 Scoring

###### 3.4.2.1 Scoring of the CET

All the objective test items went to the machine scoring; the subject items such as spot/compound dictation were graded by competent markers.

###### 3.4.2.2 Scoring of the TSE

The score record will consist of one score of communicative language ability, which is reported on a scale of 20-60. Raters evaluate each question and assign score levels using descriptors of communicative effectiveness related to language task/function, coherence and use of cohesive devices, appropriateness of response to audience/situation, and linguistic accuracy. The assigned score levels for each question are average. Because of this averaging, the scores are reported in increments of five (i.e. 20,25,30,35,40,45,50,55,60). Score level performance is described below.(Widdowson,1996)



- 60 Communication almost always effective  
55  
50 Communication generally effective  
45  
40 Communication somewhat effective  
35  
30 Communication generally not effective  
25  
20 No effective communication

Oral Proficiency Interview Scale can help to provide more detailed description of the participants' oral production ability.(Du Zihua and Jordan Singer,2001)

60. Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country where the language is natively spoken.

55. Speaking proficiency is regularly superior in all respects, usually equivalent to that of a well-educated highly articulate native speaker.

50. Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs.

45. Often able to use the language to satisfy professional needs in a wide range of sophisticated and demanding tasks.

40. Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics.

35. Able to satisfy most work requirements with language usage that is often, but not always, acceptable and effective

30. Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.

25. Can initiate and maintain predictable face-to-face conversations

#### **4. Data analysis**

This chapter will mainly deal with the quantitative analyses of the study.

Since the samples are small ( $N < 30$ ) and the groups independent, the t-test for independent samples is carried out to determine whether the differences between group 1 and group 2 in their mean scores are significant at the 5 percent level. SPSS version 11.5 has been used to compute descriptive statistics and perform Pearson product-moment correlation. Descriptive statistics is conducted in order to examine the participants' performance on each test; Pearson product –moment correlation is conducted to investigate whether there is correlation between students listening and oral English ability.

##### *4.1 The collection of raw data*

In the correlation experiment between listening and speaking, altogether 20 average students were chosen from Group 1 and Group 2(ten in each group). They were tested on listening and speaking separately and the scores were given by competent markers with the least possible errors. The aim of the tests was to see if there's correlation between students' listening and oral English ability. Therefore, the truth of the hypothesis can be clarified.

Insert Table 1 Here

Data for t-test

The test was given in the beginning of the school year, 50 students (25 students are from Group 1, the other 25 students are from Group 2) participated in the same oral test. And the test scores are shown as the following:

Insert Table 2 Here

After the period of a school-year, Group 1(control group) and Group 2(experimental group) students were tested on another oral test and the test score for each student is collected.

Insert Table 3 Here

##### *4.2 Correlation analysis between listening and speaking ability.*

In this section, we will mainly discuss whether there is a systematic relationship between the participants' listening and speaking ability. Pearson product- moment correlation coefficient will be applied, which takes into account the exact magnitude of each score on each variable. The expressions for calculating such coefficient are so devised that a value of +1 is obtained for perfect positive correlation, a value of -1 for perfect negative correlation, and a value of zero for no

correlation at all.

Insert Table 4 Here

As we saw from table IV, the value of the correlation coefficient  $r=0.689$ , the two variables (listening and speaking) are thus positively correlated. The question which now arises is just how great the correlation coefficient must be in order that we may claim a significant correlation between the variables. We may set up a null hypothesis that there is no correlation between the two variables, that is for the population from which the sample was drawn, the value of 'r' is zero. The question is now, how large must be the coefficient for there to be, say a 5 percent chance or less of obtaining the observed result with a sample of N pairs from a population in which there is actually no correlation? Table I of the Appendix IV gives the critical values of 'r' for various numbers of pairs of observations N. For our language test scores, we have  $N=20$ , and the critical value of 'r' at the 5 percent level in a non-directional test (that is, if our alternative hypothesis is simply that the two variables are correlated) is 0.444, while that in a directional test (that is, if our alternative hypothesis is that there is positive correlation) is 0.378. Therefore, whichever alternative hypothesis we have set up, the correlation coefficient is in fact significant at the 5 percent level. That is, there is significant positive correlation between listening and speaking. As regard to the students, those with higher listening ability will, naturally be good at speaking.

#### 4.3 Descriptive analysis of students' performance

This section will examine in detail the performance of the participants on the TSE before and at the end of the school year; the performance of the participants on the TSE in the two groups (the experimental group, and the control group) will be discussed and compared.

##### 4.3.1 Pre-experimental data analysis

Insert Table 4 Here

When testing the significance of differences between two means, if either or both of  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  fall below 30, we will use t-test. In the t-test, if the calculated value of 't' is greater than or equal to the critical value as determined from table II Appendix IV, we can reject the null hypothesis.

The null hypothesis: there is no significant difference between means of Group 1 and that of Group 2.

According to the above test, the calculated value t is -1.369. The number of degrees of freedom (df) is  $(N_1+N_2-2)$  or 48. Table II of Appendix IV tells us that a value of 1.684 is needed for significance at the 5 percent level. Since our calculated value ( $t = -1.369$ ) is much smaller than this, we cannot reject the null hypothesis and we conclude that we have been unable to show a significant difference between the two means, and thus the performance of the groups are, on average, not much different.

##### 4.3.2 Post-experimental data analysis

Insert Table 5 Here

The null hypothesis: There are no significant differences between the two means.

The table shows that  $t = -2.315$ . The critical value for the 5 percent level and 48df is 1.684. Since the value of 't' exceeds the critical value, we can reject the null hypothesis. As the average score of Group 2 (79.24) is much higher than that of Group 1 (74.20), we can accept the alternative hypothesis: there are significant difference between the two means, and conclude that we have been able to show a significant effect of the experimental condition on the performance of the oral English test on average. We can also observe the result from table III. For most students in Group 2, their scores are much higher than those in Group 1. In a word, Group 2 students perform better than Group 1, which proves that listening to more authentic materials can help to improve students' oral English.

## Chapter Five

### 5. Summary and conclusions

#### 5.1 Summary of the findings of the study

##### 5.1.1 Findings based on correlation analysis

As we all know that listening and speaking are closely interrelated, that's the reason why listening and speaking courses are usually incorporated into one. Does a learner's listening ability correlate with his/her speaking ability? That's the question haunting on the author's mind. If the hypothesis is true, then we can say that listening and speaking have correlations, and thus the later research can be based on this theoretical foundation.

From the data collected for correlation analysis, we found that students' listening and speaking scores are listed in two separate lines. SPSS version 11.5 has been used to perform Pearson Product-moment correlation, which is conducted to investigate the relationship between listening and speaking. The author of this thesis made two opposite hypotheses (the null and alternative hypotheses), which needed to be verified by quantitative analysis. From the analysis in 4.2 we

concluded that there is significant relationship between the participants' listening and speaking ability, which shows that if one's listening score is high, her/his speaking is good in general, and vice versa.

#### 5.1.2 Findings based on descriptive analysis

The raw data for t-test in 4.1 offered us participants' scores in Group 1 (control Group) and Group 2 (experimental Group) before (table A) and after (table B) the experiment.

##### 5.1.2.1 Pre-experimental comparison between Group 1 and Group 2

According to the analysis result drawn from the first oral English test (pre-experiment test), we see that although the mean score (75.20) of Group 2 is a little higher than that of Group 1 (72.52),  $t < \text{critical value}$ . So we accepted the null hypothesis and concluded that the performances of the two groups are not much different.

##### 5.1.2.2 Post-experimental comparison between Group 1 and Group 2

In order to test the effects of listening on improving students' oral English, another test should be designed to test students' performance in both Group 1 and 2 separately after the one-year experiment period. Compared with the result of the first test, the second oral English test indicated significant differences of students' performance in the two groups: students in group 2 (experimental group) got significantly higher scores than Group 1 students did.

#### 5.1.3 Summary

From the above test results and data analysis, we can draw a conclusion that listening does have some positive effects on improving students' oral English. The author based her research on the correlation analysis between students' listening and speaking ability and made the hypothesis: since there is a correlation between the learner's listening and speaking ability, the students who score higher in listening might obtain higher score in oral English test. By doing the experiments among two groups of students, the author of the thesis verified the truth of her hypothesis. Therefore, if we insert more listening and audio-visual materials into our oral English class, students can not only improve their listening, but also as learners they can learn skills and knowledge from the native speakers, correcting their mixed English and getting closer to native-like authentic English.

#### 5.2 Implications of the study

The result of this study shows that introducing appropriate listening and audio-visual materials into oral English class can bring in better teaching and learning results. And this study is of great importance to universities/colleges at the similar level. If we change our traditional ways of oral English teaching, and combine audio-visual means and oral practice into one, then a better result might be achieved. First of all, more vivid materials might be accessible to our students, which provide students with more authentic linguistic and cultural knowledge to learn. Second, our English teachers can easily find various materials to fit for students at different levels. Most important of all, the atmosphere in our class will be more active, and students' interests in English learning will be greatly stimulated.

#### 5.3 Limitations of the study

Owing to the limitations of research time, the experiment period only lasts for a school year, which is too short to prove the truth of the hypotheses from a strict scientific approach. However, it is the longest possible time the author can have. And also the author of this thesis relies her analysis only on one single test to get the result of the research, which is far from enough. Actually, at least two or more tests should be carried out to verify one point, because of the busy schedule of both the teachers' and the students', the author failed to do so.

In addition, the author of this thesis chooses altogether 50 students as samples of the experiments, and they are in two different classes of the same major. The small sample size is not very persuasive to prove the truth of the result, however, it is the biggest effort the author was able to do. If more students participate in the said experiments, the author's research result can be more persuasive and acceptable.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Listening and speaking have been very essential in communication and therefore, very significant in English language teaching. The skill of listening with comprehension is an essential part of communication and basic to foreign language learning. The ability to listen to English effectively is very significant, because good listening is also an important step to good speaking. Listening consists of reciprocal listening which refers to those listening tasks where there is the opportunity for the listener to interact with the speaker, and non-reciprocal listening which refers to tasks where the transfer of information is in one direction, only from the speaker to the listener. As listeners, we do not simply take language in like a tape-recorder, but interpret and get information from what we hear according to our purpose in listening as well as our learned knowledge.

Oral English, as distinguished from written English, consists of short, often fragmentary utterance, in a range of pronunciation. There is often a great deal of repetition and overlap between one speaker and another, and speakers frequently use non-specific references. According to Brown and Yule, there are two basic functions of oral English.

They are the transactional function, which is concerned with the transfer of information, and the interactional function, which has the primary purpose of maintaining social relationships. According to the development stage of speaking skill, we can make a basic distinction between dialogue and monologue. While most English learners at college level can use English at the first stage, few of them can do at the second stage. This is the skill which needs to be learned and practiced for college students who aim at improving their English.

During the early 1980s', there was much talk of listening-based methods of English teaching, and classroom research has confirmed that there are distinct advantages to listening-based methods. One of the major schism in contemporary teaching methodology is between those who prefer students to listen for information without speaking and those who require students to practice communication by both listening and speaking.

Krashen brings listening-based methods together through the notion of 'Comprehensible Input'. He claims that acquisition can take place only when people understand messages in the target language. Listening is motivated by the need to get messages out of what is heard. Foreign language learners acquire a new language by hearing in contexts where the meaning is made plain to them. Ideally, the speech they hear has enough 'old' language, (i.e.  $i$ ) and makes enough sense in the context for the new language (i.e.  $i+1$ ) to be understood and absorbed. In contrast with listening, speaking is an output process. Krashen's Input Hypothesis shows us the significance of listening to speaking as well as the way of choosing appropriate listening and audio-visual materials for our oral English class.

Appropriate listening and audio-visual materials can make students' pronunciation more native-like, because the materials chosen can offer students perfect native voice instead of fabricated ones from other sources. Also by getting access to authentic, real life listening and audio-visual materials, students can develop their cultural competence which enables them to respond with behaviors that are socially appropriate to the setting, the status of the interlocutors, the purpose, key, genre, and instrumentalities of the exchange, and the norms of interaction agreed upon by native speakers. In a word, learners will be able to better understand the speaking customs and ways of life of the target country, and thus behave more appropriately in native-speaker environments.

One test is designed to verify if there is a correlation between students listening and speaking ability, and the other two tests are to show the effects of listening on students' oral English. By analyzing the data collected from the tests we draw two conclusions: 1) there is a significant correlation between students' listening and speaking ability. 2) listening to more appropriate authentic materials can help to improve students' oral English. Therefore, it is advisable for college teachers to bring in more authentic listening materials into their class, and for students to try every possible means to get access to positive listening materials.

The research carried by the author is only a tentative one, so it can not be free from limitations. The author of this thesis calls for more work in this field by foreign language teachers and researchers.

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Table 1. Raw data for correlation analysis.

No.	Listening Score	Speaking Score
1	86	76
2	58	48
3	41	73
4	70	62
5	96	82
6	50	65
7	42	36
8	66	65
9	73	62
10	72	59
11	89	96
12	54	59
13	58	61
14	60	56
15	70	54
16	76	73
17	67	60
18	77	72
19	43	50
20	71	70

Table 2. Data for the first oral English test

No.	Group 1	Group 2
1	72	80
2	61	78
3	82	82
4	70	83
5	72	74
6	83	70
7	76	81
8	78	50
9	74	70
10	70	79
11	72	77
12	59	85
13	70	70
14	74	76
15	77	70
16	70	80
17	70	85
18	83	76
19	70	70
20	58	71
21	77	78
22	71	70
23	80	80
24	74	74
25	70	71

Table 3. Data for the second oral English test

No.	Group 1	Group 2
1	80	85
2	86	76
3	83	78
4	55	93
5	70	89
6	75	85
7	78	76
8	70	80
9	76	71
10	80	60
11	72	82
12	65	88
13	85	75
14	76	56
15	76	91
16	55	82
17	80	80
18	72	71
19	73	78
20	71	69
21	81	82
22	78	79
23	76	82
24	70	83
25	72	90

Table 4. Correlation between speaking and listening

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
LISTEN	65.50	16.185	20
SPEAK	63.95	13.056	20

Table 5. Raw oral test results 1

Group Statistics									
NUMBER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
GROUP 1	25	72.52	6.545	1.309					
2	25	75.20	7.280	1.456					

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
GROU Equal variances	.185	.669	-1.369	48	.177	-2.68	1.958	-6.617	1.257
Equal variances assumed			-1.369	47.467	.178	-2.68	1.958	-6.618	1.258

Table 6. Oral tests results 2

Group Statistics									
NUMBER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
GROUP 1	25	74.20	7.703	1.541					
2	25	79.24	8.946	1.789					

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
GROU Equal variance	.349	.558	-2.135	48	.038	-5.04	2.361	-9.787	-.293
Equal variance assumed			-2.135	46.965	.038	-5.04	2.361	-9.790	-.290



## Attitudes of the Student Teachers in English Language Teaching Programs towards Microteaching Technique

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### Abstract

This paper evaluates the attitudes of student teachers towards microteaching experiences. The research was conducted with a total of 57 fourth year students attending the ELT Department at Trakya University, in Turkey. The data were collected via a Likert type scale developed by the researcher. The research results were evaluated regarding the benefits and disadvantages of microteaching. The findings revealed that the ELT students at Trakya University in general held positive attitudes towards microteaching applications with regard to its effectiveness for professional development, self-assessment, self-confidence, material production, and teaching experiences in various courses in which students are of different ages and linguistic levels.

**Keywords:** Microteaching, ELT courses, Professional development, Teaching experiences, Student teachers

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1. Microteaching and Microteaching Activities*

Microteaching as a professional development tool in teacher training programs provides student teachers with opportunities to explore and reflect on their own and others' teaching styles and to acquire new teaching techniques and strategies. Microteaching was developed in the early and mid 1960's by Dwight Allen and his colleagues at the Stanford Teacher Education Program (Cruickshank et al., 1996). Nowadays, in many teacher education programs, microteaching is used to expand the scope of student teachers while mastering various teaching skills and teaching experiences; alternatively, it orients them to gain teaching experiences for natural classroom environments (Amobi, 2005). Two associated components are generally taken into consideration in the implementation of microteaching activities: videotaped micro lessons and feedback with individual watching of the videotaped teaching for the evaluation of teaching performance is a common practice aimed at encouraging the development of self-analysis and reflective practice; the other component in microteaching activities is the requirement of feedback (Miller and Brennan, 1983, Vare, 1994; Metcalf, et al. 1996; Brent, Wheatley and Thomson. 1996, Kponja, 2001). Following the assessment of videotaped practice and feedback, student teachers are encouraged for teaching profession.

A micro lesson may create an occasion to view a sample picture of what/how/where/whom you teach and offer opportunities for getting feedback on teaching styles, material evaluation, teaching performance, repertoire improvement, etc. in a constructive manner which is constructed with direct tutor observation of teaching. Moreover, microteaching gives the opportunity of teaching in an instructional setting in which time is limited. Such a limitation directs student teachers to prepare and implement their course subjects in a well organized and fluent way in limited time (Çakır, 2000).

Several studies have revealed that microteaching comprises practical experiences for meeting the desired objectives of training teachers to become effective and reflective in teaching profession (Çakır, 2000; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Amobi, 2005; Eick and et al., 2005; Akalin, 2005) In this sense, microteaching activities enhance student teachers to gain professional experiences such as efficiency on preparing and applying lesson plans by taking target students' capabilities, learning capacities, needs, and expectations. In consequence of such experiences, they become more conscious about their future occupations and can be able to implement teaching issues successfully in real school environments. Some studies have concluded that microteaching activities help student teachers overwhelm their anxiety levels, defeat hesitation and fear, increase professional commitment, raise consciousness about teaching profession, become efficient in all topics related to teaching proficiency, learn how to interact with students, become experienced in testing and evaluating, become professional for taking student's attention to lesson, consume time professionally, utilize educational technologies, and control classroom management (Arends, 2000; Karamustafaoğlu and Akdeniz, 2002).

The efficiency of microteaching on gaining professional consciousness is generally agreed; additionally, microteaching helps student teachers analyse their present teaching performance in order to discover their strengths and weaknesses by

engaging in reflective practice. Reflective practice in teaching implies a tendency to revisit the sequence of one's teaching for the purpose of making thoughtful judgments and decisions about improved ways of acting in the future, or in the midst of the action itself (Kottcamp, 1990). Due to the reflection by teacher educators while student teachers are teaching, reflective habits of mind can be extended (Valli, 1997); in this sense, the quality of reflection is directly related to guiding student teachers to use all aspects in their teaching experiences. Further, microteaching technique is a reflective learning process shaping student teachers' professional growth. Therefore, microteaching activities need to be considered as positive experiences which improve the development of professional awareness.

In this pattern of paying close attention to all aspects of teaching action, a microteaching cycle comprises teach, review and reflect, re-teach (Arends, 2000). First of all, a microteaching lesson is initiated by teaching stage in which student teachers teach a lesson. While teaching, they are observed by their classmates and educator; then, the lesson is discussed for evaluating student teachers' performance; after that, in re-teaching stage, student teachers re-teach the lesson with regard to the proposed points in the discussion and evaluation stage.

Preparing lesson plans, as part of microteaching activities, in conformity with the syntax of the lesson cycle is the initial stage of microteaching. Preparing lesson plans are influential for gaining teaching experiences and making decisions on teaching points, and great differences can be observed between the lesson plans prepared and applied by less experienced teachers and experienced teachers (Richards, 1998). Because less experienced teachers may tend to follow their plans and seem devoted to teaching depending on it during teaching process, while experienced ones may tend to divert from their lesson plans at some points for making decisions or adding activities to provide more practice when necessary. In this sense, teaching practice through microteaching can be assumed as a boosting activity for any interactive decision to be made during teaching. Thus, student teachers may gain experiences to make quick decisions in their lesson plans. Although organization of any course is usually planned before teaching and the activities are arranged regarding the course duration and the needs of target group, making changes in the prepared lesson plan may be required in some cases. Therefore, the sub-divisions of a lesson plan into which activities are included are ongoing processes and can be modified by teachers when any problem is encountered (Woods, 2000). Hence, the success of a micro lesson is directly related to lesson planning with comprehensible objectives in a planned sequence. Initiating the lesson by gaining the attention of students at the beginning of the presentation, presenting the planned lesson by explaining and giving examples, using gestures and body language during the presentation, focusing on the core of the planned lesson, using teaching and audio-visual aids properly, highlighting ambiguity and encouraging student participation, asking and responding questions, and concluding the teaching session by self-evaluation of student teachers and their classmates are all the subsequent stages of a micro lesson. In this context, depending on the implementation of microteaching activities, a number of studies reveal that microteaching is an effective means of improving student teachers' teaching skills depending on the prepare lesson plans (Yeany, 1978, Arends, 2000; Demirel, 2004) and a tool of continuous training applicable at all stages of the teaching profession.

Although microteaching has long been used as a professional development tool in teacher training programs, student teachers are sometimes reluctant to involve in microteaching activities due to non-natural classroom environments, material production procedures, time limited course schedules, etc., so this unenthusiastic attitude reduces the efficiency of microteaching (Stanley, 1998). In addition, lack of satisfactory awareness of the use of microteaching has led to criticisms that microteaching produces homogenized standard student teachers with model procedures and stands for a form of teaching play in unnatural surroundings, that is, the artificiality of classroom environments; in addition, the cost and maintenance of equipment regarding reduced budgets of student teachers, the amount of time for preparing materials, the difficulty of material production may also cause unwillingness (Cripwell and Geddes, 1982). The general emphasis on practice with regard to microteaching disappears during student teaching, although students still stress the importance of preparation in general. They attribute this change to the students' perceptions of a lack of time for complete preparation (Lederman and Gess-Newsome, 1991). Consequently, limited time for preparation and wastefulness of microteaching may create obstacles in teaching processes of student teachers and lead them to develop reluctant attitudes in teaching experiences. Despite these criticisms, in-depth awareness of microteaching, the motivation of the student teacher to improve himself/herself and the ability of the observer to offer comprehensive feedback may bring into remarkable improvements in teaching skills. Therefore, this article deals with how efficient microteaching as a teaching tool in teacher education is and examines the student teachers' enthusiastic and reluctant attitudes towards microteaching activities.

## 2. Sampling

The undergraduate fourth year students attending the English Language Teaching Department at Trakya University, in Turkey, were the participants in the survey. 57 student teachers participated in the survey. Participation was on a voluntary basis. The reason for conducting the research on the fourth year students was that they employed microteaching applications many times in the courses in their undergraduate studies in Turkey.



Training of teachers working in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools is proposed at the faculties of education in universities in Turkey. A standard curriculum offered by the Council of Higher Education (YOK) has been followed for educating those teachers. The Council of Higher Education has re-structured the faculties of education since 1998. The recent curriculum, which has been employed since 2006-2007 academic year, offers many courses in which student teachers can get the opportunity of employing microteaching activities. The overall aim is to prompt both teaching and learning outcomes expected from teachers of English. In this context, the issues of teaching such as preparing lesson plans, implementing it in classes, assessing and evaluating the processes of learning and teaching are sought out. Therefore, in the curriculum, the faculties of education are anticipated to have common standards as the requirement of teaching process, and the courses have been adjusted to these purposes.

The curriculum is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEF) which provides a common basis for language programmes and a comprehensive way to describe language teaching and learning processes (Council of Europe, 2002). Within the framework of CEF, the trainees are expected autonomous learners and teachers who widen the scopes of both personal and professional development. The reorientation of the curriculum has been planned within the framework of European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) and designed by taking the prerequisites of teacher training programmes and faculties of education (YOK, 2008). EPOSTL which is a means of fostering professional growth is a document by which educational knowledge and skills for teaching languages are assessed, monitored, recorded and reflected. In these processes, feedback is provided for students' performances. Since EPOSTL is a means of promoting professional growth through reflection and dialogue, it enhances autonomous learning.

The English language teacher training bachelor's degree programme, a division of teacher training at the faculties of education, takes four years and consists of basic courses and electives. The courses namely are ELT Methodology I, ELT Methodology II, Drama, Classroom Management, Teaching English to Young Learners, Teaching English to Young Learners I, Teaching Language Skills I, Turkish-English Translation, Literature and Language Teaching I (short story and novel), Teaching Language Skills II, Literature and Language Teaching II (poetry and drama), Language Teaching Materials Adaptation and Development, School Experience, Guidance, Special Education, Teaching Technologies and Material Evaluation, English Language Testing and Evaluation, Teaching Practice, Special Education Methods I, Special Education Methods II.

The general courses in the curriculum are provided for professional and practical training. Successful completion of the programme is a prerequisite for any kind of appointment on probation or permanent at the secondary education level. The courses focus on both theoretical and practical principles. In those courses student teachers are directed and tutored for the principles of education. For gaining effective teaching practices, they are required to involve in microteaching activities, presentations, and school practices.

### 3. Research questions

The present study investigated answers to the following questions:

- What are student teachers' perceptions about microteaching activities in English teacher training departments of universities?
- What advantages and disadvantages do microteaching activities impose?

Answers to those questions were thought to be helpful for teacher educators and student teachers in teacher training departments.

### 4. Research instruments

The purpose of the survey is to investigate the attitudes of student teachers towards microteaching applications. Data was generated via a Likert-type scale which was developed by the researcher. 22 items with 5 options –strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree- were included into the scale. Following the reliability analysis, 2 items were excluded from the scale and 20 items were evaluated in the scale. Some items used in the scale were worded in a positive manner and some items were reversed in meaning from the overall direction of the positive ones. The individual responses in positive items were assigned numbers 5-1 from strongly agree through strongly disagree. The reversal ones were assigned numbers 1-5 from strongly agree through strongly disagree. The results of the scale are presented in three sections in the study.

### 5. Findings

The statistical program SPSS 11.0 was used for analysis of the data. Investigation of the reliability and validity of the scale was purposed and the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the Likert-type scale was calculated as .79 (see Appendix I). The relations among the factors were analysed via factor analysis. The internal consistency of the total scale was found out to be between .35 and .73. Furthermore, the percentile values of the responses given to the items in the scale were calculated (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3).

The percentile values of the responses for 20 items were evaluated in three sections in the study. Of the positively worded items, 9 items are displayed in Table 1; and 5 positively worded items examining the students' attitudes towards microteaching in different course types are presented in Table 2; the negatively worded items are included into Table 3.

In Table 1, the items about the benefits of microteaching were evaluated. The positive statements about the beneficial and favourable scope of microteaching, items 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 imply the beneficial aspects of microteaching regarding language teaching activities in terms of pedagogical practice for different linguistic and age levels, preparing lesson plans, material production, self-assessment and self-assurance. In general sense, when the responses of the students for item 1, questioning the motivating aspect of microteaching in their present course, and item 2, questioning the favourable side of microteaching for their future occupation, were evaluated, it was seen that most of the students (74.2% and 80.4% respectively) admitted the benefits of microteaching for both their present courses and future occupations. The responses of the students for items 3, 5 and 6 inquiring into the benefits of microteaching for the students' future occupation demonstrated that nearly all students (93%) acknowledged the most central advantages of microteaching offering the opportunity for preparing lesson plans with suitable material production for a range of linguistic and age levels. More than half of the students (62.6%) thought of microteaching activities as enjoyable when applied individually (item 8). Additionally, microteaching was appraised by the students as beneficial for evaluating their teaching performance (item 7) by 82.4% students. In addition, 89.5% of the students stated that teaching methods were understood in a better way via microteaching applications (item 4); and 89% of the students stated that they met a variety of teaching activities while their classmates presented microteaching lessons (item 9); the responses for item 9 questioning the students' attitudes towards their classmates' microteaching lessons indicated that, while observing other classmates' teaching, the students learned from feedback and from others' presentation strategies. Regarding the responses of the participants in this context, it is possible to state that by observing other teaching styles and strategies and by discussing common subjects of teaching and learning, microteaching applications give participants the opportunity to practice in a supportive surrounding.

In the curriculum of ELT departments, the most suitable courses to apply microteaching activities are methodology courses, literary courses and material production courses. Therefore, in the survey, the students were also questioned about the significance of microteaching with respect to teaching literary materials and gaining experience of the methodological issues. The items dealing with the microteaching practices in specific courses are displayed in Table 2. Items 10,11,12,13,14 about the microteaching practice in specific courses such as methodological courses, short story, novel, poetry, drama analysis and teaching courses— investigate the students' attitudes towards the assistance of microteaching for getting experience to use literary materials as teaching aids with appropriate methods. The responses specified that the students, in general, valued microteaching activities as productive within those courses. However, for most of the students (91.2%), microteaching practices in methodological courses were declared to be much more constructive (item 10). In addition, the results indicate that literature courses in which teaching of poetry and drama can be implemented shared nearly the same proportion in positive manner (61.5% and 63.2% respectively); and short story and novel teaching shared the similar percentile values (80.7% and 76.9% respectively). Whatever the proportions of the items, the students generally considered microteaching activities as favourable and enjoyable to deal with in their literature courses.

Despite the benefits of microteaching technique, some critical aspects of microteaching such as a form of play in unnatural surroundings, the high cost for the maintenance of equipment, the amount of time for preparing materials, and reduced budgets of student teachers are proclaimed. For this reason, in the survey, the students were questioned on the negative aspects of microteaching in the survey and the items dealing with the negative aspects were displayed in Table 3. The statements examining the negative aspects of microteaching applications from the students' perspectives –items 15,16,17,18,19,20– are concerned with artificiality of the classroom environment, difficulties of material production, hindrances of microteaching in the learning process, limited time, and the wastefulness of microteaching. These items were reversed in meaning from the overall direction of the items indicated in Table 1. As seen in Table 3 when the students were questioned in reverse, some items in which the negative attitudes of the students were questioned verified the negative sides of microteaching activities. Although the students were favourable to material production for microteaching (item 5 in Table 1), 56.3% of the students focused on the difficulties they were confronted with while producing materials (item 17 in Table 3); 42.7% students did not agree that material production was a daunting task. Due to limited time and the unnatural classroom environments in which microteaching is implemented, half of the students (50.9% and 52.5% respectively) declared that they could not teach efficiently (items 20 and 16). While 47.4% students stated that microteaching directed them to consume the course time efficiently, 36.9% declared their disagreement on this point (item 19); however, 82.6% students did not accept the hindrances of microteaching with regard to the learning process (item 18) and 91.2% of the students considered microteaching as a useful tool (item 15). In a general sense, they were mostly enthusiastic to use the microteaching technique for the implementation of their own experiences in practice.

## **6. Limitations**

The present study shows the student teachers held positive attitudes towards microteaching as a teaching tool. But, despite the optimistic findings presented in this study, there were some limitations in the survey. The first relates to the number of

the students. 57 students were the participants of the survey, because this is total number of the students attending the ELT department; so this study reports on small scale research into the attitudes of student teachers to microteaching. Secondly, the survey was carried out at a single university, and thirdly, only fourth year undergraduate students from the ELT department of Trakya University took part in the survey. The reason for the participation of only fourth year students in the survey is the fact that those students experienced microteaching practices in all courses. Instead of the large size of the sample from all ELT departments in Turkey, conducting research on the small size of the sample from only one university was of local interest for this study. But such a study may demonstrate a profile of microteaching activities in ELT department from the student-teachers' perspectives for the similar studies. In spite of these limitations, the findings obtained from the data offer some indications about the beneficial aspects of microteaching activities.

## 7. Discussion and Suggestions

The findings of this study dealing with questioning the strong and weak points of microteaching applications in English Teacher Training program at Trakya University support the prior literature pointing out that microteaching applications are practical experiences for meeting the desired objectives of training teachers to become effective and reflective in teaching profession (Çakır, 2000; Benton-Kupper, 2001; Amobi, 2005; Eick and et al., 2005; Akalın, 2006). The overall results about motivation gained via microteaching activities in the present courses and for teaching occupation indicate that most of the students were satisfied with the applications of microteaching. The data also demonstrated the influence that microteaching applications have had in teacher education in the faculties of education was pervasive; thus, microteaching as the main medium of instruction needs to be practiced in teacher training departments for training experienced teachers. The data also showed that the respondents welcomed the use of microteaching activities and appreciated its benefits for fulfilling appropriate classroom functions. It is clear that understanding the possible role for microteaching and using it in legitimate functional contexts would be a useful tool for student teachers.

Additionally, the findings specify the creativity and resourcefulness of the microteaching activities and prove that the students, as student teachers, strongly acknowledge the usefulness of microteaching for boosting creativity. Therefore, in the light of the current data presenting the student teachers' views, it is possible to proclaim that microteaching is a useful tool in teaching practices for these students, motivates the students for the teaching profession, is beneficial for differentiating course designs for different linguistic and age levels, enhances the understanding of teaching methods in a better and more suitable way, is efficient in material production process for introducing various materials, forces the students to prepare lesson plans and is beneficial for evaluating teaching performance and getting feedback. Besides, microteaching assists and enhances student teachers to develop new teaching and learning strategies. Since microteaching focuses on teacher behaviours, it gives clues about weak and strong indications of student teachers as prospective teachers. In this sense, microteaching represents a bridge between theoretical and practical issues. In addition, microteaching may boost consciousness about organizational commitment as well as professional commitment. While preparing and implementing micro lessons, student teachers gain some insights about how to prepare their lessons as consistent with the expectations of education organizations. All these findings are in line with what Yeany, (1978), Arends, (2000) and Demirel, (2004) have pointed out about the helpful aspects of microteaching experiences.

While implementing teaching practices, student teachers may gain many experiences. One of those experiences is classroom management. In some cases, they may face misbehaviours in their classrooms. Through microteaching applications, they can gain experiences for overwhelming such undesirable behaviours and take the attention of inattentive students to lesson. Those experiences may also be gained by observing other student teachers' microteaching applications through which the classroom management is achieved or failed. In other words, microteaching allows them to have experiences before they involve in teaching practice in their future occupations. What is more, during the microteaching practices of student teachers, the rest of the class can also be aware of this fact in a cooperative manner. One more advantage of microteaching can be presumed for making instant decisions in teaching process, when necessary. Such experiences may assist them to make changes in their lesson plans. The student teachers in this survey felt that they had the advantages of feeling free for making decisions on what they wanted to include in their lesson plans and do as much practice as they wanted. So they found preparing lesson plans beneficial before microteaching applications, and they became familiar with preparing lesson plans by taking different age and linguistic levels of students into account. Thus, they could comprehend teaching methods well. An additional benefit of microteaching activities for student teachers, particularly for student teachers of English, can be acknowledged for the development of language skills. They may practice and recognize how to use language efficiently while teaching. Furthermore, microteaching applications may help student teachers develop teacher identity in pre-service teacher education. It is suggested that the initial focus on self is a necessary and valuable stage in the construction, over time, of a professional self; thus, the development of a teacher identity stands for the core aspect of the experience of becoming a student teacher (Conway and Clark, 2003). Accordingly, pointing out some of the ways for fostering student teachers' perceptions and teaching experiences about teacher identity during microteaching presentations may be beneficial for professional development of student teachers.

Although the optimistic views about microteaching were confirmed by the student teachers in this survey, some negative aspects were also admitted by the participants. Since microteaching applications were carried out with their own classmates, they mostly did not feel themselves in real classroom settings where the target learners were not real students. Moreover, even though microteaching can be assumed as an efficient way for material production process, the student teachers stated that they had troubles while producing the materials. The troubles most probably appeared due to the high cost of material production with regard to the limited budgets of students. Such pessimistic statements are in line with the former critical aspects of microteaching put forward by Cripwell and Geddes (1982) and Stanley (1998) such as the high cost for the equipment, the amount of time for preparing materials, reduced budgets of student teachers, and unnatural surroundings in which microteaching practice is realized. In this sense, it is crucially admitted that such pessimist views may restrict student teachers' enthusiasm and create reluctant attitudes towards microteaching applications.

## 8. Conclusions

In this study, 57 student teachers' attitudes towards microteaching were examined to identify the benefits and disadvantages of microteaching and the participants' responses to the items in the scale affirmed that microteaching is a favourable learning and teaching experience. Therefore, the findings in this study support those who state the beneficial aspects of microteaching applications. These findings also insert new insights into the existing studies; for example, pointing to the significance of microteaching in various courses such as methodology and literature courses in ELT highlights the functions of microteaching. On the other hand, questioning both the positive and negative aspects of microteaching indicates the student teachers' attitudes towards microteaching in every respect.

Depending on the survey results, some suggestions can be presented for further studies and applications of microteaching: microteaching as a professional tool in teacher training departments needs to be applied so as to motivate student teachers for their future occupation; since student teachers have difficulties while preparing materials, feedback can be provided for material production by tutors before introducing micro lesson; in reflective process; if students are first judged in a constructive way and then the deficiency of the micro lesson presented is judged, student teachers can be more enthusiastic to be involved in microteaching; time limitation is another significant factor that creates hindrances for the efficiency of microteaching, in order to help students overcome this challenging situation, students may prepare a lesson plan but apply only one part of the lesson, for instance, only the pre-reading or while-reading or post-reading activities of a lesson plan prepared for a reading lesson can be applied during the micro lesson. Further, student teachers can be supported to cope with the financial problems while preparing efficient materials.

For implementing microteaching activities and directing student teachers to be volunteers in such applications in a broader sense, education policies of teacher training institutions, curriculum developers, institution committees, teaching staff at those institutions can be reorganized for getting student teachers to be involved in more practices. Moreover, cooperative efforts among teaching staff can be made to tutor and motivate student teachers in microteaching activities. Such cooperation may be influential in classroom practices of student teachers. Additionally, further research including more participants from various teacher training departments of universities may be conducted to see extensive judgments of student teachers about microteaching. Another scheme can be carried out for conducting research on teacher educators in teacher training departments so as to evaluate their perspectives about microteaching activities by taking student teachers' professional developments and tendencies towards it.

To conclude, microteaching can be acknowledged as an opportunity for teaching in an instructional setting in which time is limited. The opportunities of microteaching can be ranged as: encouragement for oral presentation skills; group discussions; fluency while asking and answering questions; use of teaching aids; preparing lesson plans; material production; introducing teaching objectives; and enthusiasm in teaching. Emphasizing the skills, an aspect of language performance and creating self-confidence by opening up new ways of thinking about microteaching, gives student teachers a safer space in which they can develop not only teaching abilities but also reflective practices. In this sense, a micro lesson is an occasion for student teachers to experience all teaching strategies, and microteaching activities as a whole are beneficial for motivating student teachers for their present courses and future occupation.

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Table 1. Students' Attitudes towards microteaching in positive manner

Items	strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1. Microteaching activities motivate me in my present courses	36.8	47.4	14.0	1.8	-
2. Microteaching is favourable for my future occupation.	33.3	47.4	19.3	-	-
3. It is beneficial for my future occupation to see course designs in different linguistic and age levels through microteaching activities.	40.4	52.6	5.3	1.8	-
4. I comprehend the teaching methods in a better way with microteaching activities.	38.6	50.9	10.5	-	-
5. Microteaching is efficient in material production process.	36.8	50.9	7.0	5.3	-
6. Microteaching activities force me to learn how to prepare lesson plans	43.9	49.1	5.3	1.8	-
7. Microteaching activities are beneficial for evaluating my teaching performance.	56.1	26.3	12.3	5.3	-
8. Microteaching is enjoyable and beneficial when applied individually.	22.8	39.8	18.1	19.3	-
9. I learn through the microteaching activities of my friends within the classroom	21.1	57.9	14.0	7.0	-

Table 2. Students' attitudes towards microteaching regarding the course type

Items	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
10. Microteaching activities applied in methodology courses are beneficial in ELT	35.1	56.1	8.8	-	-
11. I enjoy dealing with microteaching in Short Story Analysis and Teaching course	26.3	54.4	14.0	5.3	-
12. Through microteaching activities, I know how to use drama in teaching process.	21.1	40.4	26.3	10.5	1.8
13. Microteaching is useful for getting experience in poetry teaching.	21.1	42.1	26.3	10.5	-
14. I get the chance of congregating various novels through microteaching applications in Novel Analysis and Teaching course.	26.3	50.9	12.3	10.5	-

Table 3. Students' attitudes towards microteaching in negative manner

Items	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Undecided 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
15. I think that microteaching activities are time consuming (i.e., they are not useful).	-	3.5	5.3	61.4	29.8
16. When I present a microteaching lesson, the classroom environment seems artificial to me	-	52.5	9.8	29.1	17.5
17. I have difficulties while producing materials for microteaching activities	-	56.3	11.1	30.4	12.3
18. Microteaching activities create hindrances within the learning process	-	7.0	10.4	67.3	15.3
19. Microteaching directs me to consume the course time inefficiently	15.8	31.6	15.8	31.6	5.3
20. Microteaching is time limited, so I cannot teach freely as a teacher.	8.8	42.1	17.5	31.6	-

## Appendix I: Alpha Coefficients and Factor Analysis of the Items

Items	Alpha	Factor
1. Microteaching activities motivate me in my present courses	,78	,76
2. Microteaching is favourable for my future occupation.	,78	,51
3. It is beneficial for my future occupation to see course designs in different linguistic and age levels through microteaching activities.	,77	,72
4. I comprehend the teaching methods in a better way with microteaching activities.	,78	,53
5. Microteaching is efficient in material production process.	,78	,53
6. Microteaching activities force me to learn how to prepare lesson plans	,78	,52
7. Microteaching activities are beneficial for evaluating my teaching performance.	,78	,38
8. Microteaching is enjoyable and beneficial when applied individually.	,80	,48
9. I learn through the microteaching activities of my friends within the classroom	,80	,35
10. Microteaching activities applied in methodology courses are beneficial in ELT	,78	,73
11. I enjoy dealing with microteaching in Short Story Analysis and Teaching course	,78	,73
12. Through microteaching activities, I know how to use drama in teaching process.	,79	,64
13. Microteaching is useful for getting experience in poetry teaching.	,78	,57
14. I get the chance of congregating various novels through microteaching applications in Novel Analysis and Teaching course.	,78	,64
15. I think that microteaching activities are time consuming (i.e., they are not useful).	,78	,68
16. When I present a microteaching lesson, the classroom environment seems artificial to me	,80	,66
17. I have difficulties while producing materials for microteaching activities	,78	,50
18. Microteaching activities create hindrances within the learning process	,77	,61
19. Microteaching directs me to consume the course time inefficiently	,78	,46
20. Microteaching is time limited, so I cannot teach freely as a teacher.	,80	,49



## How to Teach Aural English More Effectively

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### Abstract

As a means of communication, listening plays an important role in people's life. In foreign language classroom, listening comprehension has never drawn the same attention of educators as it now does. So it is a vital importance to teach aural English more effectively. In view of present situation of aural English teaching and wrong ideas about it, the problems in traditional aural English teaching have been discussed, including monotonous pattern of teaching, ineffectiveness of teachers' roles, students' passivity, orientation at exams instead of students' abilities and so forth. Then suggestions are presented on how to teach aural English more effectively: first, diversifying patterns of teaching should throw the emphasis on teaching in authentic environments and interaction between listening and other teaching activities; secondly, teachers should design listening activities for the class, build good interaction in the class and cultivate more creative methods in their teaching to change their ineffective roles; thirdly, students' passive roles in class should also be modified by harmonizing their extrinsic motivations and intrinsic motivations; finally, the relationship between exams and development of abilities should be coordinated by using different strategies in different cases. Yet, there still exist a lot of problems in aural English teaching. For example, how to use authentic recordings in aural English teaching? Is it necessary to have audio equipment in order to train listening skills? And how to build the listeners' confidence in listeners? etc. Therefore, there is still a long way to go for EFL educators.

**Keywords:** Aural English, Problems, Suggestions

### 1. Introduction

#### *1.1 The present situation of aural English teaching*

The ability to understand and participate in speech communication is one of recent concerns in foreign language education that has generated a stronger focus on listening in the classroom. It is one of the main tasks of teachers to teach aural English more effectively so as to improve students' aural ability. Not only should teachers know the teaching materials well, but also they should pay more attention to teaching methods. However, the present situation of aural English teaching is not satisfactory. Though there is at least one hour of listening for every college student every week, the students who share the same textbooks and tape-recorders are not interested in their aural English classes and they are bored with monotonous class atmosphere in which they usually listen to some materials and finish their exercises and then check their answers with teachers. The teachers are also bored with pressing the play button and repeating the answers again and again. All the participants in aural classes are tired of having this kind of courses. All above-mentioned are caused by the wrong ideas about aural English teaching.

#### *1.2 Wrong ideas about aural English teaching*

First, it is thought that teaching aural English is easier than other courses. Instead of good preparation before classes and considerate arrangement inside classes, aural English teachers are used to playing the tapes for students in their classes. Second, choice of listening materials is not considerate as important in teaching. According to a research, listening materials have not been changed for several years. As is known to all, one of the main reasons for getting students to listen to spoken English is to let them hear different varieties and accents rather than just the voice of their teachers and tape-recorders with their own idiosyncrasies. Therefore, listening materials play an important role in teaching. Third, it is wrongly considerate that the same listening tasks are applicable for all students of different levels. Teachers usually let students listen to the same materials and do the same exercises in teaching instead of considering students' different levels. Furthermore, it is believed that getting the answers to questions is the purpose of aural English teaching. As a result, so many misunderstandings cause a lot of problems in our teaching. Therefore, it is important for educators to think over how to teach aural English more effectively.

### 2. Problems in Traditional Aural English Teaching

#### *2.1 Monotonous pattern of teaching*

Most people think that teaching aural English is easier than teaching other aspects of language, because the purpose of aural English is clear and teaching pattern is unchangeable. At present, teaching aural English is beyond realistic environment. First, students cannot see speakers, and have no chance of responding to speakers. They can just imagine

the situation in their mind. Then, the tape-recorders' speeches are quite different from those in real life: they are more formal and unnatural. These problems make it hard for students to adapt themselves to an authentic environment of communication.

Apart from that, listening is not an isolated activity in class. However, we seldom see students read, speak and write something in aural class. As an old saying shows: One tree doesn't make a forest. All the learning activities are combined together. Monotonous pattern of teaching obviously result in both teachers' unconcern and students' indifference.

### *2.2 Ineffectiveness of teachers' roles*

Most of aural English teachers do not have a teaching plan. They usually ask students to listen and then finish the exercises based on the sequence of textbook. In this case, teachers are equal to an intelligent machine. As we know, telling people how to master the skills of fishing is much more important than giving them fish. Therefore, telling students the listening methods is better than giving their answers. Ineffectiveness of teachers' roles causes the effect that students have learned little from them. In addition, teachers always keep silent except in the circumstances of checking answers with students. Depressing atmosphere makes students feel oppressive, and little communication brings us an unsatisfied result.

### *2.3 Students' passivity*

First, students do not need to think about the answers to the exercises that are available in the listening materials. Their motivation for taking part in aural English class is that they want to get high mark in exams instead of developing themselves. Secondly, students always do something under the teachers' instructions. Teachers control the process of class. Thirdly, the only way for students to participate in aural English class is to listen. Therefore, they are passive in class. Students' passivity makes teachers also inactive, so we must try our best to break the vicious circle.

### *2.4 Orientation at exams rather than students' abilities*

So many teachers and students pay much attention to exams, and the purpose of daily teaching is to make students achieve their goals in exams, therefore, finishing the exercises on the textbook is the main project in aural English class. It may results in slow improvement in students' abilities. For example, it takes nearly a whole term for teachers to give students specific training before TEM-4 or TEM-8, but the results of these exams are not always as good as expectation. In fact, our purpose of learning aural English is to communicate with foreigners easier and understand their culture, while examination is a means to achieve that goal. At present, the real purpose is covered by its means. That phenomenon sets us off thinking.

## **3. Suggestions for aural English teaching**

### *3.1 Diversifying patterns of teaching*

#### *3.1.1 Creating authentic environments of learning*

At present, monotony of teaching patterns is a largest problem in aural English teaching. It seems as if aural English teaching is conducted on a fixed model, in which students listen to the tape and check the answers with teachers. They sit usually in the same classroom and do the same things. In fact, listening environments and materials affect our degree of understanding. The purpose of aural English teaching is to cultivate students' abilities of understanding authentic materials. To reach this purpose, teachers should try to create authentic environments of learning, which has the following features:

#### *1) Visibility of the speakers*

In most situations, listening is not just an aural activity. We are usually able to see speaker, who provides non-verbal clues to meaning, for example, lip movements, facial expression, and gestures. (Hedge, 2002: 242) So we should think again about how much we ought to use recordings as the basis of our exercises in aural English class and teachers are encouraged to make full use of conversation on videos or communicate with students by words.

#### *2) Participation of the listeners*

In many, perhaps most, cases the listener is required to give some kind of overt, immediate response to what has been said. This may be verbal (the answer to a question, for instance) or non-verbal (action in accordance with instructions, a nod of the head, for example). Even a lecturer or orator gets some sort of feedback from his audience in the form of facial expression.

Yet many classroom listening comprehension exercises demand no response until the end of fairly long stretches of speech, so that when it comes this response is very largely a test of memory rather of comprehension. The teachers should try their best to have the students take the initiative in learning in class. The students should take part in listening materials under the personal direction of their teacher.



### 3) Environmental features

Apart from the speaker himself-his facial expression, posture, eye direction, proximity, gesture, tone of voice-a real-life listening situation is normally rich in environmental clues as to the content and implications of what is said. Often noises or smells or other sense-stimulus can contribute valuable background information, but I think it is true to say that most environmental clues are visual. Occasionally the general surroundings contribute information. If we are in a railway station, for example, and hear an announcement over the loudspeaker, we expect it to announce the arrival or departure of a train.

“Environmental clues are often more likely to provide information about the situation, speakers and general atmosphere than about the actual topic of discourse.”(Ur, 2000: 5) If the listener/onlooker cannot understand the meaning of the words used in a family discussion, board meeting or political harangue, he will not be able to say much about the subject of debate, what he will be able to guess fairly accurately, however, are things such as the level of formality, the amount and kind of emotional involvement of the speakers, the kind of relationship existing between speakers and listeners-all of which afford him significant assistance in comprehending the sense of what is said once he actually understands at least some of the language. Sound recording, broadcasts and telephone conversations used in aural English class are relatively poor in such clues, but these normally comprise only a small part of our total listening activity. In classroom terms, environmental clues are normally represented by visual materials (illustrations, diagrams, maps and so on) which are thus essential to the effective presentation of most listening exercises and which should be used widely.

### 4) Real-life language features

It is necessary to draw a distinction between formal speech or ‘spoken prose’ and the informal speech used in most spontaneous conversation. Informal speech is usually both spontaneous and colloquial; formal speech is usually characteristically neither.

It would seem reasonable to say that classroom practice should usually incorporate such characteristics of real-life listening, as those described above; yet many books of listening exercises do not include any of them at all. Such books are made up of passages originally composed as written texts (extracts from novels, newspaper articles and so on) recorded onto tape, the listeners listen to the text without knowing much about what they are going to hear or what they are listening for, and then have to answer comprehension questions, usually multiple choices. This is a convenient classroom technique, and it does give a certain type of practice, but it does not provide any realistic preparation for real-life listening. A learner who relies on this type of exercise is going to have a awakening when he tries to understand native speech in natural communicative situation. Therefore the selection of listening materials is very important in teaching. The materials should be authentic instead of imaginative.

#### 3.1.2 Integrating listening with other teaching activities

“For almost six decades now research and practice in English, language teaching has identified the ‘four skills’-listening, speaking, reading and writing-as of paramount importance”. (Brown, 2000: 218) With all our history of treating the four skills in separate segments of a curriculum, there is nevertheless a more recent trend toward skill integration, which makes aural English teaching more varied.

#### 1) Oral activities in aural teaching

Students with accurate aural perception can often reproduce sounds they hear without having the slightest idea of what these mean. However, the more complex the material is reproduced, the more difficult it is to repeat it accurately without understanding. Repetition is based on understanding. On the other hand, repetition is rather time-consuming. One student repeats a single word or a sentence, while most students are silent and relatively inactive most of time. So some useful practice may be obtained by the use of pair-work or group-work (students take turns to repeat it). In addition, when students’ listening is improved through repetition to some extent, a role-playing and imitation are appropriate to them. It is a process that remembering is changed into understanding. All the oral activities diversify the patterns of class and improve students’ aural abilities.

#### 2) Reading and writing activities in aural teaching

Students always listen to materials and teachers’ words in aural class. In fact, reading and writing activities help students understand to a certain extent. After listening, reading the materials under teachers’ instruction assist them to have a full understanding of background knowledge and contents of the materials. Besides, asking one student to read a passage he prepared before class is also a good opportunity for others to practice their listening, which at the same time makes students be accustomed to varied accent. Furthermore, accuracy of pronunciation through reading is improved. Then, doing blank filling and writing down their opinion about listening materials will help students understand them correctly and fully.

To sum up, there are a lot of methods to diversify patterns of aural teaching. Teachers may choose one of them or some

of them to achieve their teaching goals depending upon different circumstances.

### 3.2 *Modifying teachers' roles*

#### 3.2.1 Designing Listening Activities for the Classroom

Listening is one of the most challenging skills for our students to develop and yet also one of the most important. By developing their ability to listen well we develop our students' ability to become more independent learners, as by hearing accurately they are much more likely to be able to reproduce accurately, refine their understanding of grammar and develop their own vocabulary. This section is to outline a framework that can be used to design a listening lesson that will develop your students' listening skills and look at some of the issues involved.

##### Pre-listening

There are certain goals that should be achieved before students attempt to listen to any text. First, it is enormously important that before listening students are motivated to listen, so the teacher should try to select a text that they will find interesting and then design tasks that will arouse your students' interest and curiosity. Besides, "the teachers can also emphasize learning processes by stating goal before listening. Such statements are important because learners are made aware of what the teachers are trying to achieve." (Nunan, 2001: 218) Secondly, listening to a tape recording in a classroom is very unnatural process. The text has been taken from its original environment and teachers need to design tasks that will help students to understand the text. Teachers should provide background knowledge and specific vocabulary or expressions for students before listening. It's vital that teachers cover this before they start to listen.

##### While-listening

"The work at the while-listening stage needs to link in relevant ways to the pre-listening work. While they listen, learners will need to be involved in an authentic purpose for listening and encouraged to attend to the text more intensively or more extensively, for gist or for specific information." (Hedge, 2002: 252) For learners in the early stages of developing listening ability, simple activities such as ticking a list or numbering pictures in correct order will prevent the anxiety arising from trying to write while listening. More advanced learners will be able to cope with more complex tasks. There are sometimes three times for listening. The first listening task makes students grasp a general understanding of the text, then students should have a greater and more detailed understanding of the text in the second time; The third listening task could just be a matter of checking their own answers from the second task or could lead students towards some more subtle interpretations of the text.

##### Post-listening

In this session, the teachers and students check and discuss the response to the while-listening task. The teachers' role is to help students see how successful they have been in doing the task. Furthermore, post-listening work can also usually involve integration with other skills through development of the topic into reading, speaking, or writing. If materials follow this route, it becomes important to ensure that new sources of motivation arise for students other than the interest of the original text.

Within this section I have tried to describe a framework for listening development that could be applied to any listening text. This isn't the only way to develop our students listening or to structure a listening lesson, but it is one of effective and motivating ways for students.

#### 3.2.2 Building Good Interaction in Classroom

In aural English classrooms, the language, whether it is English or native language is the medium through which teachers teach, and students demonstrate what they have learned.

##### 1) Teacher-student interaction

"Most of the teacher-student interaction in a lesson follows the pattern that beginning with teacher initiation, which is followed by a student's response, and then the teacher's evaluation of that response." (Johnson, 2000: 96) In aural English class, teacher's evaluations depend on the students' responses to both the teacher's initiation and materials they listen. Consequently, listening is the medium for an exchange between teachers and students. In aural teaching, teachers are encouraged to give students initiation to arouse their interest instead of keeping silent. "Apart from adapting their language, experienced teachers also use physical movements: gestures, expressions, and mime. It becomes almost second nature to show happiness and sadness, movement and time sequences, concepts using these techniques. They become a part of the language teachers' use, especially with students at lower levels". (Scrivener, 2002: 98)

Meanwhile, teachers should encourage students to communicate with them. For example, asking students to speak out their answers to listening exercises is one of the effective ways. In addition, listening exercises is not only a process that students understand and remember something, but also a preparation for thinking. Then they may discuss their thoughts with students by asking questions. In a word, interaction between teachers and students will forward the development of their listening.

## 2) Student-student interaction

So far, much of our attention has focused on understanding classroom communication by looking at the interaction that occurs between teachers and students. However, by doing so we have ignored another important dimension of classroom interaction occurs between students themselves. In aural English class, interaction between students seldom occurs. In fact, this interaction, such as pair work, group work, is good for lessons, makes contribution to their understanding. Meanwhile, the exchange of ideas by English is another chance for them to listen something about materials. On the other hand, teachers must also effectively harmonize the conflicts inevitable in student-student interaction.

### 3.2.3 Employing Creative Methods of Teaching

It is important to develop students' creativity and practice in education reformation at present, while classroom teaching is the main position to achieve it. Teachers' primary task is to change traditional conception of education and train qualified talent. Then what are teachers' creative methods in aural English class?

#### 1) Arousing questions in students' mind

"According to a certain teaching content and listening materials, it is necessary for teachers to design a lot of flexible questions before class". (McDonough, 2000:171). Maybe there are various answers to these questions. Although they have listened to the same materials, they may give different answers based on the degrees of their understanding. In addition, teachers may stop listening to ask students what will happen next while listening. Students may give different answers. "Another way of increasing learner involvement is by providing extension tasks that take the listening materials as a point of departure, but which then lead learners into providing part of the content themselves". For example, the students might listen to someone describing the work they do, and then create a set of questions for interviewing the person. Therefore, the task of aural English is that students' listening abilities would be improved instead of just getting the answers to exercises in their students' books.

#### 2) Making students participate actively in class

In traditional aural English class, teachers ask students to do something according to their teaching plan. Nowadays, the relationship of equality and cooperation between teachers and students is encouraged because free class is beneficial for students to study well. In aural English class, teachers should encourage students to take part in class actively. For example, a role-playing based on listening materials and listening to something popular and interesting will bring us unimaginable effects.

### 3.3 Modifying students' roles

As mentioned above, students now play passive roles in class. It's important to modify students' roles in aural English class. Let's see something useful: "One of the most successful language learning experiences we know about took place towards the end of the Second World War when the American military needed to train their personnel the languages of the countries they would have to administer and/or deal with. In short intensive courses, the students learnt fantastically fast." (Harmer, 2000: 8) In fact, a lot of factors affect listening; however, learner's motivation is obvious among them.

<u><b>Factors of Listeners</b></u>	<u><b>Concerned with Results in Listening</b></u>
<i>Motivation</i>	0.727
<i>Tactics</i>	0.715
<i>Language knowledge</i>	0.676
<i>Background knowledge</i>	0.623
<i>Mentality</i>	0.565
<i>Learners' background</i>	0.432

(DengYuan, Yang Zhiqing 2004:11)

Therefore, motivation is the most important factor. Researchers divide learners' motivation into two kinds: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. "Extrinsic motivation comes from the desire to get a reward or avoid punishment; the focus is on something external to learn activity itself. With intrinsic motivation the learning experience is its own reward. Research indicates that, while extrinsic motivation can also be beneficial, learning is most favorably influenced by intrinsic orientations, especially for long-term retention." (Arnold, 2000: 14) So it is important to develop intrinsic motivation in order to change their passive role. It is much more interesting to respond actively to something than to listen passively, and a well-constructed task can be fun as well as beneficial to listening, for an element of puzzle-solving or game-playing is easily built in. Here we must try to avoid boring or over-theoretical subjects, using the ones we think our students may interest in, that seem to be of practical relevance, and may arouse or stimulate their interests. A little drama or humor can do a great deal towards such purpose if it is not of a particularly high standard of

sophistication. Connection between intrinsic motivation and external motivation may change students' passive roles and make them active in class.

### 3.4 Coordinating the relationship between exams and development of abilities

#### 3.4.1 Their correlation

This issue of correlation between exams and development of abilities becomes crucial when teachers are giving their students instructions. What is the correlation between them? There is a continuing debate about that. An exam whose purpose is to improve students' abilities rather than discriminate among students is one of the tools for testing students' abilities. Meanwhile, the result of exams will stimulate students to study well. In aural English class, exams such as filling the blanks, making choices in daily exercises and even formal exam papers are everywhere. Those exams indeed make students pay much attention to their scores of exams. However, overemphasis on exams brings students pressure. On the other hand, development of students' abilities can be reflected in their exams. A competent student can do well in exams; therefore, exams and development of their abilities are not contradictory. However, why are the relationships between them dealt with badly sometimes?

#### 3.4.2 Strategies

First, appropriate training before exams is beneficial to the improvement of students' abilities, which can familiarize the students with the task types in exams.

Another way in which students' ability has been improved is that aural English teachers tell them some listening skills instead of how to finish exam paper. Having mastery of listening skills enable students to cope with all kinds of examination with ease, while training in light of a certain examination do not benefit them a lot.

In addition, teachers should make the teaching plans on the premise of combination of training for exams and development of ability. Teachers coordinate the relationship between them in their daily teaching. For example, content of exam is infiltrated into cultivation of ability, while there is focalization in it.

### 4. Conclusion

Obviously, we have faced many problems in aural English teaching. Anyhow, we must try our best to solve them. Aural English teaching involves the teaching patterns, teachers' and students' roles in class and the correlation between exams and development of abilities. Various patterns of teaching might attract both teachers and students. Besides, teachers should provide as much positive practice as possible by talking to learners in English, by exposing them to a range of listening materials in the classroom, and by encouraging them to use whatever resources available in their institution or community in the ways suggested in this paper. Meanwhile, ways should be cultivated to involve more actively in class. Furthermore, teachers should coordinate the relationship between exams and development of abilities. To sum up, it is important to pay more attention to aural English teaching, and we still have a long way to go.

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## Encourage Learners in the Large Class to Speak English in Group Work

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### Abstract

Large-class English teaching is an inexorable trend in many Chinese universities and colleges, which leads to a strange and serious phenomenon that most students' English is ironically but vividly described as "the dumb English". Therefore, cultivating students' communicative skills and developing their language competence has become a clear focus and an urgent task for all the college English teachers in China. This paper explores some useful speaking activities that can be adapted in group work in some way to suit Chinese learners. It suggests that it is necessary to reform the current instruction model in College English classes, and the group work can help develop the students' competence of English speaking.

**Keywords:** Large-class teaching, Group work, Competence, Speaking opportunities

### 1. Introduction

The increasing enrollment of college students from 1990 in China pushed college English teaching to confront with a new challenge: the inexorable trend of large-class English teaching in many universities and colleges. According to the statistics of the survey conducted by the National College English Committee, the average number of students in college English classes surpassed 80 in 2005. As far as my university is concerned, in the fall semester of 2006, there were 36 large classes with about 100 students, which made up approximately 75% of the college English classes. Owing to the widely acknowledged difficulty of managing a large class, most teachers naturally adopt a traditional teacher-centered or lecture-like approach for large class teaching, that is, students sit in straight rows facing the teacher, who does most of the talking. Through years' of English study, students have managed to learn large amounts of vocabulary and every subtle grammatical rule by heart, and passed the CET-4 or CET-6 (national College English Test required for undergraduate students), but in the real communications, they are completely at a loss what to say and how to express themselves in English. Their English is ironically but vividly described as "the dumb English", which is such a strange and serious phenomenon that completely goes against the normal principle of communicative language teaching and learning and deviates from the objective of College English Curriculum Requirements issued by the Ministry of Education in January 2004, which stipulates that "the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future work and social interactions they will be able to exchange information effectively through both spoken and written channels..." Therefore, cultivating students' communicative skills while developing their language competence has become a clear focus and an urgent task for all the college English teachers in China.

In fact, in recent years, in line with a more learner-focused view of education, there has been increasing interest in language learners themselves and how they approach the task of learning. Language teachers should always keep in mind that in any situation, students should always be the center of the classroom and the center of learning, and cultivating students' communicative competence depends greatly on the practical use of the language and the frequent interaction with the peers. On the basis of the idea proposed by Nation (2002) that a balanced language course should consist of four major strands of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency development and considering the language learning features and the present ineffective large class teaching method, I am thinking of implementing group work to promote students to speak English, which is the most important praxis for effective teaching in the large EFL classrooms.

As most problems may have a variety of causes which to some degree reflect the variety of individuals in a class, there is likely to be a variety of solutions rather than one possible solution to this problem. From this perspective, this article focuses on the problem of students' insufficient ability to speak English mainly caused by large class teaching and tries to suggest a package of complementary solutions to approach the problem. Besides, this classroom problem is solved mostly through the application of pedagogical skills rather than through administrative or disciplinary procedures.

### 2. Group Work can Encourage Learning

The concept of group work, to some extent, in which students generally work together in face-to-face groups engaging

in discussion and assisting one another in understanding isn't something new. Richard Felder, an expert in teaching, once suggested group work was especially important for large classes, where getting students engaged was usually a challenge. The larger the class, the more imperative it was to use it. David Johnson's research at the University of Minnesota further showed that getting students to do things in small groups in class was the only conceivable way to get large-scale student involvement in a large class. With these small groups a teacher could immediately engage everyone in a large class in learning activities. Shy students were more likely to ask and answer questions in a group setting. The same was true with low-skill students. Michael H. Long and Patricia A. Porter (1985) presented five pedagogical arguments for the use of group work in second language learning concerning the potential of group work for increasing the quantity of language practice opportunities, for improving the quality of student talk, for individualizing instruction, for creating a positive affective climate in the classroom, and for increasing student motivation.

In essence, compared with the traditional teacher-centered teaching approach, group work is learner-centered, task-based and especially distinctive in three aspects. First, it is multiple-interactive. In conventional teaching, only interaction between teachers and students is promoted. Group work encourages multiple interactions including interactions between students and interactions between teachers and students. Second, it is quality-oriented. In the natural setting of communication in a small group, learners are not only limited to produce hurried and isolated sentences. Rather they can engage in cohesive and coherent sequences of utterances, thereby developing discourse competence. Meanwhile, learners can take on roles and adopt positions and produce a range of language functions associated with those roles and positions. For example, in a problem-solving activity, learners can suggest, infer, qualify, hypothesize, generalize or disagree. Third, it is productive. Unlike the teacher-fronted classroom where learners just receive systematic instruction in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of the language, group work provides more language practice opportunities for conversations, where students can work together to produce language through speaking and given appropriate materials to work with or problems to solve, they can engage in the creative language use and develop communicative competence in the English language.

According to Nation (1988), group work can help learning in the following ways: learning the content matter in the activity, learning new language items from other participants in the activity, development of fluency in the use of previously met language items, learning communication strategies, and development of skill in the production of comprehensible spoken discourse. All these serve as the learning goals which can only be achieved through speaking activities in group work.

### 3. Use Group Work to Increase Speaking Opportunities in the Large Class

Creating and adapting group work activities to develop students' speaking skill are part of classroom management strategies. To use them, a teacher needs to adopt appropriate ways and to train learners to work effectively in groups. The results are a very productive learning environment with a lot of fun for everyone. The following are some of the group work activities and strategies which can be used to promote students' ability in speaking in the large class.

#### 3.1 The Superior-inferior Arrangement

The superior-inferior arrangement is the most common group work in which one or two learners, in the superior position, have all the information that the others in the group need, and know what the correct answers should be. One of the common techniques used in this arrangement is *Draw with feedback*. One learner has a picture which he describes to the other learner who draws it by following the description. When the learner who draws the picture has made her attempt, she shows her drawing to the learner who describes the picture. The learner who describes the picture looks carefully and then tells the learner who draws the picture what is wrong with the drawing and continues describing until the drawing is eventually the same as the original. Then learners can change roles. The aim of this technique is to give learners practice in describing and giving directions as well as communicating with each other. Typically, this activity can be varied based on the information provided such as *Follow the map*, *Draw it*, *Complete the map*, *Complete the picture*, *Arrange the furniture*, *Put them in Order* and so on.

The other common technique is *Interview* in which one learner is usually asked questions by several interviewers. Interviews can be used to involve everyone in the activity and can cover personal information, likes and dislikes, understanding of previously studied materials such as written texts or pictures, or interesting past experiences. During the interview activity, the learner being interviewed should add extra information to the answers to the questions and the interviewers should use the information provided by the interviewee as basis for further questioning. This strategy is useful for keeping a conversation going and is a worthwhile speaking activity.

Other suitable activities include *finding a story*, *questioning*, *information transfer*, *giving directions and completion*. Research on peer teaching (Allen, 1976) shows that the superior-inferior arrangement can result in a lot of useful learning.

#### 3.2 The Combining Arrangement

Learners in this kind of group work are all on an equal footing and each one has information that the others need in

order to complete a piece of work. Because of this, each learner must communicate his information to the others so that all the information can be combined to complete the task. By using combining arrangement activities with small groups within a large class, the positive feelings of group members towards each other, including those from different racial groups increase. The activities of combining arrangement includes *matching* (pictures, words and descriptions, and pictures and descriptions), *completion* (completing a picture by exchanging information and completing a story by pooling ideas), and *ordering* (putting the sentences or pictures of a story in order), among which the most useful ones are those involving *split information* and *strip story*. The strip story is a split information ordering technique that provides a large amount of speaking practice. The teacher chooses a story that learners have not seen before and which has as many sentences as there are learners in the group. He writes each sentence of the story on a different piece of paper and gives each learner one of these pieces of paper. Each learner has to memorize his sentence and destroys the piece of paper. Then each learner tells his sentence to the others in the group, and without writing anything down, all the learners must organize themselves to solve the problem by putting the sentences in the right order to tell the story. The teacher takes no part in the activity. Sometimes puzzles can be used instead of a story to make the activity more interesting and challenging. Gibson (1975) describes a combining technique that is done with a group of ten people or more working together.

Techniques which involve split information have been called various names-dycoms, jigsaw groups, two-way tasks, combining arrangement and information gap activities. Split information activities involve a balance of information between the learners with each learner having about the same amount of unique, essential information. The splitting of information can involve the following kinds of materials-a written text, a picture or pictures, text and pictures, and each of these can be split in various ways. For Example, in *Complete the map*, each learner has a map of a town. However, on one learner's map only some of the roads are named. On the second learners' map the railway station and the airport are shown. On the third learner's map the shops and factories are indicated. On the fourth learner's map the park, the school and hospital are given. By combining their information, a complete map can be made. Activities involving split information like this can help with the learning of content material and language including learning new language items, developing fluency with previously met items and practicing communication strategies. Meanwhile, such activities can ensure participation, encourage negotiation and feedback, improve students' attitude to learning and suit some learners' preferred interaction styles.

### 3.3 The Co-operating Arrangement

The essential feature of the co-operating arrangement is that all learners have equal access to the same information and have equal access to each other's view of it. The purpose of a cooperating activity is for learners to share their understanding of the solutions to the task or of the material involved. Cooperating arrangement requires some degree of equality between learners, particularly a rough equality of skill. Research shows that group performance is often inferior to the best individual's performance if there is an exceptional individual in the group (Hill, 1982). Thus, for cooperating activities, it is best to put exceptional learners in one group rather than to spread them across groups. The most suitable tasks for cooperating group work include: *ranking activities*, (ranking a list of items), *brainstorming activities* (brainstorming the use of a paperclip on a desert island), *classification activities* and *problem solving activities*. In particular, problem-solving tasks often involve personal, moral or social problems which are useful materials for group discussion because they encourage learners to use and share their knowledge of the world. They are more preferred by teachers because they are highly motivated goal-directed and have a very important feature of definite outcome to the activity which can get learners involved. Nation (2000) suggests a lot of topics for problem-solving tasks in his book *Creating Adapting and Using Language Teaching Techniques* which language teachers can choose, design and adapt.

There are four steps that can be followed in making problem-solving tasks. Firstly the teacher focuses on a learning goal such as a focus on language, content, skill or discourse and presents the topic to the learners, for example, *a student who cheats in the exam or a friend who steals things from the shop*. Secondly, the teacher decides on the problem and its outcome, which may be a solution or a list of solutions. Thirdly, he specifies the context of the problem, and finally splits the information and assigns roles. Usually, the problems should be presented with more options, description of choices and background information to lead to more learning. After that, learners form small groups for problem-solving discussion, which can be organized using pyramid procedure. They can either brainstorm the problem and think of as many solutions as possible or select from a number of solutions and rank them. And then the group shares its solution or decision on a course of action and reasons with the whole class.

The major problem with cooperating arrangement is encouraging each learner to play an active part in group. Various strategies have been used to deal with non- participation. One way is to give each learner in the group a different job to do. Another is to have a reward structure. A third way is to change group size or people in the group to provide optimum climate in each group for participation to occur.

### 3.4 The Individual Arrangement

In this kind of activity, each learner has the same information but must perform individually with a part of that

information. The most useful activity is *Say it!* All learners in a group can see a grid. Each section of the grid has a different task. Each learner in turn calls on another in the group to perform the task outlined in a particular box in the grid. Sometimes a *Say it* activity can be made into a small scale role play, which is usually based on a text learners have just read.

The other suitable tasks for the individual arrangement include *problem-solving role play*, *retelling a story* and *completion*. Especially, role play is a feature which can be added to a speaking activity because it not only allows a wider range of language functions and language varieties to occur and exploration of issues, but also adds interest to the activity and results in repetition of the speaking activity. As role play has its risk of embarrassment and withdrawal of cooperation, it should get preparation which may include a role card with a written description of roles learners play or using an expert group/ family group procedure where learners who have the same roles get together in a group to practice and talk about their roles. When they are ready, they go to their mixed groups. There are several kinds of roles and jobs. The most common one involves taking on a different personality. Other roles involve discussion-helping procedure. For example, one learner encourages others to speak by asking, 'What do you think?' or 'Which one do you favor?' Another learner can have special responsibility for summarizing what others have said, like 'So you think that...' or 'So you decided that...' Another can raise problems like 'But what if...' Another deliberately disagrees by saying 'No. That's not a good idea. I think...' or 'I don't agree with you. I think we should...' Another has the job to praise the good ideas. As each learner has a task, he must contribute to the discussion.

Generally speaking, group work techniques which are appropriate for encouraging learners to speak English in a large class include the most useful ones like information transfer activities, split information tasks, matching activities, ordering activities, ranking activities, role play, problem solving discussion, interview activities, say it, and completion, of which some share the feature of superior-inferior group work, other have the characteristics of combining arrangement, the co-operating arrangement and the individual arrangement. When a teacher creates and adapts the above speaking activities, he should always be clear in his own mind about the learning goal for each technique, that is, he should choose the activities and the ways of varying them with learning goal in the mind, and then he should make sure the outcome of the activity and the way information is distributed. At the same time, he should pay attention to the seating arrangement and the social relationship between the members of the group to keep learners busy, interested, active and thoughtful. According to the four major strands of a balanced language course, speaking fits within the strand of meaning-focused output, which must be complemented by meaning-focused input, language-focused learning and fluency development in roughly equal proportions.

#### **4. Match the difficulty of Speaking Tasks with the Learners' Proficiency**

As we know, too many difficulties in the speaking tasks will overwhelm the learners, while too few will leave them restless, so it is important for a teacher to be able to spend time on an item or skill, try to bridge gap between the difficulty of the task with learners' proficiency and bring the knowledge and skills largely within the learners' experience. One way of bring a task within the learners' experience is to inform learners of the learning goal and outcome of each task. Once the task is "well-informed", learners may have a clear picture of how to find the best possible answer rather than setting for a weaker alternative, which enhances the negotiation of meaning and tends to stimulate interaction. Typical goals involve language items, idea or content, skill and text or discourse. The outcome is the decision that is made to complete the task. For example, in the ranking activity, the outcome is a ranked list of items. The other way is to provide learners with chances to practice what they need to do the task by pre-teaching the needed language items and skills. The tasks provided in this way can increase the quantity and quality of the language learners generate. Another way is by using staged tasks. Teachers can base the skills and centered tasks on the curriculum. At the very beginning, relatively easy tasks are chosen for learners to do and gradually the difficulty of the tasks is increased. Another way is by recalling learners' previous experience through negotiating with each other. Techniques like semantic mapping, expert group/ family group procedure, 4/3/2 activity, pyramid procedure are all the good and useful ways of practice and preparation for speaking to occur successfully and for the fluency development strand. Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggested language emerge when the learner is ready.

#### **5. Create Conditions for Speaking to Occur in Group Work**

The learners concerned are the non-English majors at colleges and universities, who apparently already possess the linguistic competence. What they need is proper conditions which not only allow but encourage them to talk in English. As experienced, well-trained English instructors, we should know the importance of structuring time in our lessons for learners to practice their English with partners or in groups. After all, learners build fluency and accuracy by talking, not by listening to the teacher talk. There are several important general factors that may make speaking activities more effective in large class.

Interest is the most important enabling condition for speaking. According to intrinsic motivation theory, interest is an in-born drive to display one's ability and confidence. In order to arouse learners interest in speaking, firstly, the teacher should choose materials that fit the learners appetites such as topics in newspapers and magazines, the latest news on



line, personal, moral and social problems and many other issues of students' concern, which the class can brainstorm and spark a lot of discussion in small groups. As expected, learners will show great enthusiasm in speaking in a state of relaxation and enjoyment. What's more, the teacher may ask learners to choose subjects that they are fond of. One effective way is through the use of *issue logs*. Each learner decides on an interesting topic and over a period of several weeks collects information on this topic from newspapers, radio and television news, books magazines and interviews etc. Each week the learner reports orally to a small group who discusses the report and every two weeks produces a written summary of recent events related to the topic. These activities involve the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing with repeated attention to the same topic area and can provide conditions for interest and fluency development.

Encouragement can give learners confidence in speaking. Most learners are afraid of speaking English because they are shy and nervous and afraid of making errors. Even when a learner has a high level of language proficiency, he still unavoidably makes errors. As McArthur (1983:107) suggests "he knows very well what he should have done, but owing to the nervousness, tiredness, pressure and the effects of inner translation, he just lapses and forgets for a moment what to do". Brown (1980:164) also proposes "Human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes." Therefore, teachers should create an atmosphere in which learners are encouraged to talk in English and are praised for talking. If a teacher places too much attention on errors and neglects the necessary encouragement, he will lose sight of value of the positive reinforcement of clear and free communication. Clearly, encouragement can give learners self-confidence and are more important than constant correction in the speaking class.

Non-threatening tasks provide learners with chances to talk in a relaxed and informal environment among peers. According to Nation (1997), learners are reluctant to speak English because they feel the task is threatening and embarrassing. One way of dealing with this is letting learners choose the groups they work in so that they feel comfortable with the group members. Another way is no participation of the teacher in the discussion as he may be the cause of embarrassment. For example, in the combining group work, learners are communicating with each other as equals and the teacher is not involved, which can achieve more communications and a lot of fun. Others may include getting learners prepared for the task and choosing topics that are relevant, personalized and meaningful.

Setting up a monitoring system is a practical strategy for speaking English in group work. A monitoring system may include assigning each learner in the group a job whose duty is to keep the speaking activity going in an effective way, building up a punishment-reward system accordingly and giving learners continuous assessment and making record of personal achievement.

Making English a necessary part for the task is considered to be an effective way for learners to speak English. Such speaking activities as split information tasks, interview, ranking, making decision, strip story and problem-solving role play require learners not only to repeat language items but also produce the generative use of the language. Therefore, everyone in the group has no choice but communicate in English in a purposeful way. For example, in the combining arrangement, there is a need for each learner in the group to communicate with the others.

Other factors such as creating the extracurricular activities and taking advantage of computer-assisted language learning can also be used to help to approach the problem. Obviously smaller classes can provide more opportunities for interaction. However, if not properly organized, small classes are often approached as if they were large, with hardly any interaction. Similarly, with the implementation of group work plus special rich speaking activities, large classes can be approached as if they were small.

## 6. Conclusion

The varieties of speaking tasks in group work and range of solutions suggested in this article are directed to the traditional teacher-centered teaching approach in large English classes at colleges and universities in China and the serious consequence it brought. Such solutions should not be seen as alternatives but mainly as complementary ways of dealing with the problem. That is, it may be more effective to try an integrated set of various ways of dealing with the problem. The problem of encouraging learners in large class to speak English in groups has been approached from the four directions: the advantages of group work, the application of the various group work activities, the viewpoint of learners' proficiency for speaking, feasible conditions for speaking activities in groups, all of which contribute a lot to the problem.

In summary, with the application of learner-centered instruction mode to college English teaching and the implementation of group work in large class, more and more learners will be highly motivated, be exposed to authentic language, have chances to participate in discussion or speaking activities in groups, and become relatively fluent and successful in terms of message communication. In addition, several change will unavoidable occur. The teacher's role will change from a lecturer to a guide leading learners through the different processes of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency development, a referee standing in the way of chaos, directing confusion towards productive conversation, a monitor controlling groups to free exchange of information, a

facilitator and even a co-learner. Learners also assume new roles in the group work. They are collaborators and active participants rather than the only passive knowledge receivers. The class mode will change from teacher-centered, teacher-led and teacher-fronted to learner-centered and task-based. With these changes, most of the class time will be devoted to the learners, which allows for a greater quantity and richer variety of language practice. Consequently, the structures and the features of the speaking tasks in the group work will make the college English classes more attractive.

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## English Language as a Requirement Course for Information Students -- A Content Analysis of English Syllabus in the Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies/ Nile Valley University

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### Abstract

The study investigated the importance of two elements in the process of syllabus design (ends / means specifications, program implementation) in the faculty of Islamic and Arabic studies, Nile Valley University, designed in 1995. Results indicate that the ends/means specifications stage is used to present the general aims and the objective of each course. A general description of each course is also given. Program implementation is completely left for the teacher's decision. The paper shows related literature review for information students. This kind of literature review (linguistic contents) may however change the Program Implementation to a highly individualistic and subjective stage. Materials writing are left only for teachers and this may cause variations in the linguistic contents of the prescribed courses and this in turn may lead to many hidden syllabuses. Teachers training as a unique step in program implementation stage is lacking since there is no ESP teacher program available

**Keywords:** Felt needs, Perceived needs, Program implementation, Material writing, Needs Analysis, Ends Specifications

### 1. Introduction:

The ministry of high education in Sudan has decided that university English requirements should be taught in 8 credits. By the end of the second year these credit must be taught and examined. What has been required from student in the past few years is just to pass successfully the requirements. This has recently been changed to calculate the grade point average of these requirements. The change in calculating the unit values of these requirements might have been decided to increase the students' motivation, although in fact you can make your students more motivated by using other learning techniques. So what is the philosophy behind taking such a decision? I leave it as an open question. The different specializations in the one faculty are always taught these requirements together in one classroom. This situation might, however, change or reduce these requirements to a kind of common core English. University requirement units which have recently been established in some Sudanese universities have designed English syllabuses not different from student previous English language school – curriculum to be taught as English requirements for the different departments. This has posed the following questions:

Who has participated in these designs?

What resources of information and expertise that has been available?

Who is responsible for formalizing the outcomes as a syllabus document the university or the ministry of high education?

Can such a program be considered as a coherent curriculum which can be exposed to maintenance and renewal?

What has been hypothesized in this paper is that there is no causal relationship between university English requirements as an intervention or independent variable and the students' improvement in their subject - related disciplines (as a dependent variable). For internal validity of this hypothesis the three criteria suggested by Lazarsfeld (1959) are met. the first is that the cause(requirement program) precedes the effect (students standards) in time. The second is that the two variables are empirically correlated to each other. The third is that there is no third variable that influences the process of teaching these requirements. The three criteria are met because the program implementation of these requirements has been conducted in the faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies. Many questions will arouse in the coming literature review. One of the important questions is which is better for specifying validly the target communicative competence of the learners, the felt needs or the perceived needs ? Sudan mainly depends upon the judgments of the certified experts (normative or objective needs) to decide about the materials. The paper is questioning the probability of the English teacher to decide about the following : when design a syllabus can the English teacher focus on the knowledge offered in the materials, view of what is involved in the materials, decide about values and attitudes, cognitive abilities of the different students, and the role relations within the classroom. Materials need the process of rethinking, supplementing or abandoning .How can this be attained by the teacher alone? So reading my literature review will show you the subjectivity of needs definition.. Needs – based syllabuses are of controversial issue and it needs alternative philosophies of planning.

Most English courses materials in Sudan have been written and are writing by English teachers alone. This, however, leads us to the main question in this paper which is do other countries design their students' materials the same way.

### *1.1 Methodology:*

Data are collected through carefully investigating the previous syllabus designed by specialized committee in 1995. An approach of content analysis has shown that the ends and means specifications level as a second stage of decision has been achieved (appendix). The third stage of program implementation has not sufficiently planned. Teaching materials pertain to students related disciplines has been proved to be of great importance to the pedagogy of ESP. The coming part of this paper shows how does writing materials need to pursue a kind of literature review in the related field. The coming literature review is itself can be considered as descriptive or exploratory approach to this kind of unobtrusive observation about writing to the media. This kind of literature review affords mutually consistent and complementary answer to the question of what resources of information and expertise that must be available when designing the syllabus. Many answers to our questions can be hinted or extracted from this type of literature pertaining to media writing and its rules. Data were compiled from the historical documents of the syllabus designed in the faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies/Nile Valley University. The data were used to answer properly the posed questions of this paper. The participants who have undergone this experiment were all English teachers. What has been done was only the second stage of curriculum development which is ends /means specifications (Appendix). The third stage of program implementation of curriculum development is completely left for the teachers. teachers should select linguistic contents, vocabulary, grammar, notions, functions and s/he should grade the syllabus in whatever way s/he thinks appropriate for his students. What is needed is a kind of planning which caters much for learners consideration, knowledge consideration, instructional and management considerations as designed by Rodgers(1980). Rodgers later on (1983) called this kind of planning polity determination. Rodgers' polity planning framework which is based on the four mentioned factors discusses, evaluates every kind of a syllabus. That is the four considerations give the planners the chance for negotiations the strengths and weaknesses of the suggested syllabus. This may however turn the process of design a syllabus to multi-dimensional, qualitative, interactive, and participants-extended options. Thus what has been done by the specialized committee is likewise what has been done by Munby(1978). In his attempt to design communicative syllabus, Munby has constructed a system from which syllabus content can be derived. What the specialized committee has done is just specifying ends and means leaving the whole process of decision –making for the teachers. How can contextual constraints be decided by the English teacher, and how can these constraints be organized by a teacher alone. How could the teacher decide about time, energy and money. How can s/he co-ordinate the selected materials.

## **2. Literature Review (Selected Linguistic Contents)**

### *2.1 Reporting the News as a Process of Communication:*

Language symbols alone have no meaning, but their real meaning is usually included in their referential kind of items, or to the event which they stand for, as stated by Anderson et. al. (1964, P. 90), and what the referent of a word means, depends on the individual's experience with that word. This leads to what is called the word's literal meaning (denotations), and intentional meaning (connotations) which sustain greatly the analysis of the nature of the lexicon. Therefore, the process of communication is always thought of as intrapersonal communication (within the self), and interpersonal one (between two or more people), (Grunder et. al, 1977, P. 20).

Most essential to note is that communication process is regarded as a complex process, because it has so many angles shared together in order to produce and interpret a message. Giffin & Patton's (1971, P.45), assume that there are six people involved whenever there is communication. The first is the person you think yourself to be. The second one is the man your partner thinks you are, and the third is the person you believe your partner thinks you are. Plus the three equivalent persons are those at the end of the circuit. That is the same three persons on behalf of your partner's view.

This supports Davison's (1976, PP.71 – 76) assumption that different newspapers may offer different versions of the same event, since each one represents a different political climate. Moreover, journalistic content in general is greatly influenced by the audience's attitudes towards what is offered by the newspaper.

Defleur & Dennis (1981, P. 137) distinguish between newspapers and magazines. They claim that a magazine is published less frequently; manufactured in a different format usually on better quality paper, bound rather than just folded, and with some kind of cover. Besides that magazines usually tend to tackle topics in broader perspectives.

According to differences in cultures various political climates, news gathering agencies are criticized in looking forward to objective, straight, factual reporting, irrespective with determining associated meanings through analyzing facts. This leads editors like Erwin Canham to claim that the "background, surrounding circumstance prior events motivation – all are part of the real and basic news" Rivers (1964, P. 180). Here, this kind of interpretation is actually the best kind of reporting. That is knowledge of a situation is the vital element in interpreting reporting. This also leads to know how media content or foreign news supplied by wire services might be killed, rewritten, or transmitted further because of the

internal local pressures of a particular community, and sources that make and control decisions. This is clearly investigated in Watson & Hill's (1997, PP. 4 – 91) terms of 'agenda setting' and gatekeeper.

There is also what is called the alternative journalist who is usually thought of as being neutral. The advocacy journalist is one who writes always with a commitment to a particular view point, (Emery & Smythe, 1972, PP.120– 25).

It can be assumed then that a journalist as an individual may have a political position which might be influenced and interpreted through the expectations and ideology which guide his political behavior (Mueller, 1973, P.101).

## 2.2 Technicalities of Writing Feature Headlines:

In most notable newspapers headlines are always written by copy editors who "'stand midway between the reporter and the editor', (Rivers 1964, P .288). They are intended to capture the attention of the reader; give gist of the story, grade the news symbolically, attract and hold the attention of the reader to the particular article (Duff & Shindler, 1984, PP. 4-24).

Rivers (1964, PP. 288 – 295) suggests certain criteria for writing a headline. The first is that headlines or 'heads' must be deduced or rendered out of the information that appears in the first few sentences of a newstory . These first sentences are called the 'leads', and defined by Rivers (ibid, P. 156) as that kind of sentences which include the five Ws (who, what, when, where and why), and which explain the how as well. Hamilton& Krinsky, (1996, P. 51) call this phenomenon the immutable journalistic law of the five Ws and H.

Journalists also tend to relate events in chronological order. That is events are described in descending order of importance. The first short opening sentences give the gist of the whole story, using the technique of the five 'W' and 'H'. This process of ordering is known in journalism by the inverted pyramid which is considered for a long time as the standard form for presenting news. The five Ws and H are exemplified by Rivers' (1964, P .167), as follows.

HOLLYWOOD- A police detective was shot to death Sunday when he and a companion were Kidnapped on HOLLYWOOD BLVD, and forced to derive two ex-convicts 60 miles. (Rivers, 1964: 167)

The second criteria of writing a headline as (Rivers, 1964, P .167) indicated is that 'heads' must be written in present tense so that it can give a reader a sense of immediacy. See also Duff& shindler, (1984, P .4).

Heads must also contain a verb, either expressed or implied. Verbs forms must be written, exception is only permitted in some editorials. The following examples are taken from Rivers.

Faculty Codifies Absence Rules:

The above example shows that verb-form is recommended rather than the nouns-form.

Regulations for absences:

It is to note here that verb 'to be' and the articles 'a', 'an' and 'the' are always omitted in headlines. Exception to this is made only if they are essential to real meaning of the head. for example:

Actor found dead:

(Duff, Shindler, 1984, P .4).

In the above example if 'articles',and 'the' verb to be' are included, the headline will appear as the follows.

An actor has been found dead:

Heads also are written in the active voice, rather than the passive so that ambiguity can be removed. The future is expressed in heads by the form of the future tense, or the infinitive form, or the present tense with a date. Example:.

MP to open health centre:

(Duff, Shindler, 1984, P. 4)

Rivers (1964) also provides miscellaneous rules of writing headlines. These rules can be stated, as not to separate parts of a verb, or proper nouns between lines. Verb – first – form is avoided, and instead a noun – first – form is used. Also one does not separate the preposition and its object, and not to separate an adjective and the word it described. Also generally a 'comma' is used in a place of 'and'. And one should not repeat the same word twice. Well known abbreviations are always used to save space and time. Finally all first letters in lines must be capitalized, and all the principle words.

Many devices are used in writing features headlines, but punning of words is considered to be the most common one. Devices that can be included are Rhyme, Alliteration, twisted cliché, and allusions. As, for puns, Christ (1982, P. 4 – 8) assumes that because of the oddities of English spelling puns are much found and can easily be made up.

Hamilton & Krinsky (1996, PP. 47 – 61) illustrates that the age of big, bold, brassy headlines is now dying. However, more emphasis has been given to the total page design and packaging of news. That if the information is so compelling a

good story writes itself. Therefore, and in order to provide examples of headlines, Duff & Shindler (1984, P. 8) are recommending the following example which shows how a journalist writes economically.

Council budget axed:

Journalists always leave out words that do not add to the content like the articles, verb to be' prepositions. Thus nouns are always piled together. But, in a future passive form 'verb to be' is used as in the following example.

Health centre to be opened by MP:

Also, there are times in which nouns can not be piled and prepositions can not be left out as in the following example.

Model killed by doctor:

Nurse in village killing:

Puns or (playing with meaning) can also be done on words with different meanings where each meaning is vital to the particular story. Example of this is the following headline.

It's the sole clue:

The above headline shows a story where the sole clue to who had carried out a theft was on the sole of a shoe.

It also can be played on words of the same pronunciation, and which have different spellings, and therefore different meanings, but each is essential to the story. Example of this would be the following headlines.

Weight for it:

In this story a man has to wait before he can collect winnings from a bet concerning his weight.

Rhyming also appears in words which echo each other's sound. Example of this is the following.

Greater Crater:

Alliteration is used in words which start with the same letter or sound. Example to this is the following.

Channel champion:

Duff & Shindler (1984, P.5) concluded by saying that, whenever one is looking at headlines that play with language, he may find that some of the connections may be rather loose. Hence, one should use his imagination to grasp the intended meaning. That is one does not expect the precision of a dictionary. However, this can be replaced by that one must use appropriate pragmatic inferences to carry out the meaning of these codes, or headlines.

Duff & Shindler (ibid) further state that the reporter can convey his\ her meanings in formal or conversational style. They provide the following examples to illustrate this.

Mr Smith became interested in Vaccination:

John took a fancy to a jab ...

Thus, the reporter has many tools to use in determining his style. S\He can use humor, irony or literary devices and reference words or juxtaposition of ideas. Example of this juxtaposition of ideas would be the following.

I didn't vote in the local elections this Year. None of the candidates appealed to me.

Essential to note here is that this journalistic technique of 'juxtaposition of ideas', can be replaced by Widdowson's (1979) linguistic analysis by two – level propositions which appears in the following example.

The unions refused to accept the government's proposal. Unemployment has been rising steadily over the past few months.

Here, Widdowson (1979) indicates that at the level of form, there are two separate sentences, and at the content level, there are two separate propositions. That is the second sentence proposition explains the state of affairs described in the first sentence, since, that sentence propositions usually satisfy conditions which identify different communicative acts.

### 2.3 Writing Feature:

In writing features, the reporter usually reacts positively or negatively to the life around him. Features are highly individualistic, and are considered as vehicles of opinion (Rivers, 1964, P. 185).

In defining what feature is, the answer would be all the published materials in the papers are considered features with exception to editorial, reviews and opinion columns. Rivers (1964) adds that feature writer must often judge, and should never advocate. Furthermore, features differ from stories in that they are always factual. They are divided in human interest issues; interviews, sport reporters and family affairs. For a question within an interview and multifunctionality of utterances as speech acts Schiffirin, (1994 , PP.14- 85).

#### 2.4 Communication Problems:

Most essential to note here is that when sending a letter or a message, the communication process should entail no physical, physiological impairment or psychological problems Berko, (1977, P.10 – 13). By physical is meant, the outside interference or noise that blocks the receiver from hearing the message, and physiological impairment is used to describe biological flaws such as deafness in people who do not have the sensory capabilities to receive a message, unless they use some mechanical devices. Semantic problems which usually include cultural difference may hinder understanding. Example of semantic problems is represented by foreign diplomats who are assigned to American embassies in Washington. Those diplomats always translate the word “catsup” (tomato sauce), at the verb “catch up”. Syntactic problems always include the message encoded without grammar – rules. Example of this is a two year old girl who says ‘milk’. This word can not be interpreted in a good sense unless its context of situation is identified. Therefore, it may mean ‘I don’t want the milk’, or I want a glass of milk’.

Rivers (1964) indicates that precise writing in journalism entails removal of what is called vague language. Although, sentences like “boy are supposed to be Boys”, “you can not find anyone over thirty”, which are exemplified by Berko (1977) are considered as social noise or problems, but pragmatic theory may provide reasonable interpretation to such kind of sentences.

Here, it is important to note term of vague additives to such kind of repetition. They are exemplified by Rivers (1964) as in the following words:

Dead body	body
New innovation	innovation
Future Plans	plans
Canary bird	canary
Invited guests	guests

They are described by Ferguson (1980) as “identical twin”. Example of this is the following.

Our mayor is lifelong native of our city.

Ferguson (1980) shows that the above sentence should be rewritten like the following.

Our mayor is a native of our city.

Another example is

Please save this list for future reference.

Please save this for reference.

Finally it can be said that such concepts of vague language always lead editors to correct errors of grammar. And be so precise in judging news values; look for the right word; remove the unnecessary words (empty words) as preferred by Ferguson (1980). Editors must also bear special attention to moveable parts such as ‘almost’, ‘even’, ‘hardly’, ‘just’, ‘merely’, ‘never’, ‘rarely’, and the confusing pronouns (Ferguson, 1980, P 7).

-Editors should cater for Lyons’ (1977) assumption that statements usually express propositions which are in turn reflecting the writer’s attitudes and behaviors. He notes that much of the information that is conveyed from speaker to addressee in conversation is implied rather than asserted.

Watson & Hill (1997, P.54) name the item which may influence the way in which messages are encoded or decoded as cultural capital. They define it as knowledge, tastes, attitudes, values and assumptions which individual or groups possess in response to various cultures.

This cultural capital can be represented as the journalist’s or editor’s or newspaper’s attitudes towards the propositions which are chosen to be written or stated, thus, this cultural capital will be catered for in interpreting or reading journalistic texts .

Competence is used to mean what the speaker of the language knows implicitly however, what s/he really does is considered as his performance. To instance for that, we find that the traditional grammar does not actually formulate the rules of grammar, but instead it affords examples and hints that determine the grammar. Chomsky’s generative grammar on the other hand goes beyond the view of traditional grammar by giving attention to what is called ‘creativity of language’ (Allen & Burn 1971, P.2). Notwithstanding, it has widely been agreed that the general problem appears in corresponding form to meaning. That is, the distinction made between what is said and what is meant. Levinson (1983) confirms that one can ‘read in’ an utterance more than what it conventionally means. That is to say, one can say something to indicate something else.

### 3. Conclusions

3.1 Materials writers and teacher trainers have not fully practiced the role assigned for them when designing the syllabus of the faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies

3.2 Hidden syllabuses were formed because of the variations of the linguistic contents chosen by teachers. That is the specialized committee has left the teacher in the mid way to decide about how to implement the ends /means specifications that have already been identified.

3.3 Media as ESP has many idiosyncrasies and different style of writing .There should be a unanimous agreement by all the planners about the syllabus linguistic contents. This stage of program implementation has not found enough consideration by the specialized committee which has been selected to the assigned job.

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### Appendix

Nile Valley University

Faculty of Islamic & Arabic Studies

Ends & Means Specifications (Reviewed by Specialized Committee Common Core English

First year

Objectives .

- A. To develop the language four skills with special emphasis on Reading.
- B. To reinforce English grammar and pronunciation contextually.
- C. To develop basic study skills e.g. dictionary use.



## Course Description

The course will include texts of general interests and subject related texts. These texts will act as sources of generating communicative activities, and in that sense grammar will be taught implicitly. The learners are encouraged to develop the basic study skills e.g. Informational transfer, paragraph writing and dictionary use (Oxford Learner's Dictionary is recommended)

ESP General Aims,

(Second – fourth year)

- a) To develop students' communicative abilities through carefully selected Islamic texts.
- b) To increase the learners' vocabulary subject related disciplines.
- c) To introduce and practice translation at all levels i.e. phrase – sentence, texts.
- d) To understand and practice Arabic transliteration.

## Information Department

Second year

Course Description.

ESP	ESP
201	202

Written and spoken texts are selected from Islamic propagation and media (Journalism broadcasting, TV.) Students are encouraged to communicate orally in the field mentioned above. In this context grammar, pronunciation, transliteration are thoroughly practiced. Translation is introduced at a sentence level.

Third year

ESP	ESP
301	301

Students are exposed to authentic texts from the various means of communication (media). Students are trained in the propagation and journalistic techniques e.g. editing. Translation is practiced at a paragraph level.

Fourth year

ESP	ESP
401	401

Students will be exposed to advanced text. Students are made aware of the distinctive features of these texts e.g. headlines. Type size, eye catch effect. Translation is practiced on longer texts. Towards the end of the eighth semester students should be able to give oral presentation on topics related to their studies.



## A Survey on the English Learning Strategy of the Rural High School Students and Urban High School Students

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### Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the overall characteristics of the rural and urban high school students' learning strategy selection and use. The results indicate that the general frequency of the subjects' learning strategies selection and use is not satisfying. Among the six learning strategies, the most used strategies are affective strategies, and the least used strategies by the subjects are social strategies. What's more, the research results show that the urban students, compared to the rural ones, do better in using all the strategies. But through T- test analysis we can find that there is only significant difference in the using of compensation and social strategies between them and no evident distinction exists between the two groups when using metacognitive, cognitive, affective and memory strategies.

**Keywords:** Survey, English learning strategy, Rural high school students, Urban high school students

### 1. Introduction

Since the early 1970's, a gradual but significant shift has taken place in the field of language teaching, resulting in less emphasis on teacher and teaching and greater stress on learners and learning. The theoretical impetus for examining how learners approach the task of learning a second language can be attributed to the changing views on the nature of mind which were put forward by the theory and research in the field of cognitive science. Some applied linguists and psychologists began to pay much more attention to the study of individual learner differences.

The first researcher who studied the learners' strategies was Aron Carton. He first pointed out that the different learners employed the different inference methods. Enlightened by his research, some linguists (Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; Naiman 1978) began to do some research on the characteristics of the successful language learners and meanwhile identify some learning strategies they employed in order to benefit the less successful language learners. Soon afterwards, the various definition taxonomies and research results on language learning strategies emerged constantly.

For the Chinese learners, their learning surroundings, learning goals, task requirements and their learning motivation are quite different from abroad. Whether the foreign research findings apply to the Chinese learners is still a question. Therefore, there is a great need to investigate the learning strategies among the Chinese students so that we have a better understanding of what characteristics of their learning strategies are and what learning strategies training they need to achieve their goals.

In contrast to the foreign researches, China developed the work in this field a bit later. Exactly speaking, some researches were conducted in the late 1980's. What's more, almost all the researches focused on not only the college students but also the English majors and few have been done among the middle school students at present. In the basic teaching stage, one task of the middle school English teaching is to help the learners to cultivate their good learning habit and effective learning strategies. The middle school students belong to an independent learning group, so the learning strategies they employ should possess their own particularity. Therefore, there is a great need for the educators to know clearly about the overall characteristics of the students' learning strategy selection and use so that the teachers can help them to form their proper learning strategies consciously and to improve their learning efficiency in the practical process of English teaching. Based on such a purpose, we adopt a questionnaire to investigate the learning strategies used among the rural and urban high school students, and then try to make clear the difference exists between them..

### 2. Research Method

Considering the characteristics of this study, that is, we are going to investigate the learning strategy use among the rural and urban high school students, and additionally, owing to the limitation of time, space funds and personnel, a survey method is adopted.

### 2.1 The sample for the investigation

The subjects of the study are 300 rural high school students and 300 urban high school students. They are selected randomly from two schools: Qingyun No.2 middle school, which is rural school; Dezhou No.1 middle school, which is urban school. All the subjects have had the experience of at least 4 years in language learning. In the class, I asked them to complete the research papers I handed out. I also emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and what they ought to do was just to circle the answers which accorded with their facts.

### 2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire contains two sections. Section I is on the background information which is intended to help the researcher better understand the results of the survey in context. It includes name, gender, age, English achievement, school type, and the cultural background and career of their parents. Section II is on language learning strategy use. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Version 7.0 (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990) is adopted. On this basis some necessary revision has been made so as to adapt to the Chinese students. Meanwhile the SILL has been translated into Chinese, so that there will be no difficulty for the subjects in understanding them. The SILL adopts Likert Scale, containing 60 items, each with 5 choices ranging from 'the statement is never true or usually not true or somewhat true of me' to the statement is usually or always true of me'.

These 60 items are divided into 6 categories according to the strategy classification system put forward by Oxford (1990): metacognitive strategies (1-10); cognitive strategies (11-20); memory strategies (21-30); compensation strategies (31-40); affective strategies (41-50); social strategies (51-60).

After the questionnaire was finished, 69 invalid papers were abandoned, and 531 papers were collected altogether. The related data was conducted by SPSS 10.0.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1 Frequencies for strategies

A descriptive analysis has been conducted to compare the frequencies for the strategy use of the high school students, that is, the mean scores of the six types of learning strategies are calculated by the computer. According to Oxford's calculating method, the mean from 1.0 to 1.4 stands for never using this strategy; the mean from 1.5 to 2.4 stands for usually not using this strategy; the mean from 2.5 to 3.4 stands for sometimes using this strategy; the mean from 3.5 to 4.4 stands for usually using this strategy; and the mean from 4.5 to 5.0 stands for always using this strategy. The mean from 1.0 to 2.4 means the low frequency; the mean from 2.5 to 3.4 means the middle frequency and the mean from 3.5 to 5.0 means high frequency. Table 1 presents us with the overall frequencies of the subjects' learning strategy selection and use.

Generally speaking, the result of the investigation is not satisfying. According to the table above, through calculating, the general means is 3.247, which indicates the frequency of the students' learning strategy selection and use is in the middle level as a whole. Of the six strategies, the frequency of the students' using affective strategies is highest, and its mean reaches 3.569, belonging to the range of high frequency. Affective strategies are very important for the language learning, which can help learners to gain control over such factors as emotions, attitude, motivation and value. Such result indicates that the majority of the students have been aware of the importance of English learning and meanwhile they have the positive attitude towards it. But this finding is inconsistent with some foreign researchers, for example, Chamot et al. (1987) found that the powerful affective strategies are woefully underused---reported by about 1 in every 20 language learners. Metacognitive strategies contain three sets: centering the learning, arranging and planning for learning and evaluating the learning, which can provide a way for the learners to coordinate their learning process. In this study, although the mean of metacognitive strategies is 3.430, belonging to the range of middle frequency, but of all the strategies, the frequency of metacognitive strategies use is the second, which indicates the subjects can manage, monitor and evaluate their learning process basically. This result is likely to be related to their age. Generally speaking, compared to the junior middle school students, the subjects have clearer learning objectives, and the better capacity in self-monitoring, self-management and self evaluation. On the other hand, as we all know that the Chinese students, especially the rural ones, almost all have a higher expectation towards learning and the majorities are high motivated. So they possess a definite learning goal, and know well about the importance and utility of the learning. According to Atkinson's expectancy-value theory, people are more motivated to learn when they believe learning will lead to positive outcomes and when they value the positive outcomes. Nae-Dong Yang (1999) found that self-efficacy beliefs (the expectancy component of motivation) and intrinsic value (the students' goal for the task as well as their beliefs about the importance, utility and interest of the task) are both positively related to the use of metacognitive strategies.

As to cognitive strategies, memory strategies and compensation strategies, their means are 3.379, 3.276 and 3.089 respectively, which indicates the frequency of the subjects' strategies selection and use belongs to the middle level. Such results are normal. It is well known that the teaching goal in the middle school is to make the students possess some abilities in listening, speaking reading and writing. In order to reach it, the students therefore often employ some

cognitive strategies, such as saying or doing something over and over again; taking notes; comparing elements of the new language with elements of Chinese to determine similarities and dissimilarities and so on. Memory strategies such as grouping or using images have a highly specific function: helping students store and retrieve new information. That reason why the subjects in this study employ memory strategies more frequently is that memory has already been regarded as an effective learning method in the Chinese traditional culture.

The findings also show the least used strategies by the subjects are social strategies, which is inconsistent with some foreign research results. Social strategies are very important because language is a kind of a social behavior, which help the learners learn through interaction with others, such as asking questions or cooperating with others. That the Chinese high school students are reported using them less frequently may be related to their learning situation. As is known to all, English in China is not a second language, but a foreign one. The students learn it only in a very formal setting, that is, in the classroom. Besides it's much harder to find or create any opportunity to learn the language in the natural environments. So there are no real communicative settings for the learners either in the classroom or out of it. What's more, spoken English is not yet the necessity in the system of the formal examinations. Therefore, Both the teachers and the students have neglected the training of social strategies.

### *3.2 The differences between urban students and rural students*

In this section a T-test has been conducted so as to compare the differences in the use of learning strategies between the urban students and rural students.

From table 2 we can find that the mean scored by the urban students is higher in using all the strategies, that's the city school students, compared to the rural ones, do better in using all the strategies. But through T- test analysis shown in table 3 and table 4 we can see that there is only significant difference in the using of compensation and social strategies between them and no evident distinction exists between the two groups when using metacognitive, cognitive, affective and memory strategies.

Compensation strategies are such strategies as enable learners to use the new language for either compensation or production despite limitations in knowledge. The intention of the strategies is to make up for an inadequate mastery of grammar and especially, vocabulary. Compensation strategies are so important and necessary that they should be considered to be an essential part in the process of language learning. The reason why the significant differences exist between the two groups may be related to the teachers' teaching activities and the subjects' studying motivation.

Undoubtedly, the teaching level in the rural areas is obviously lower than that in the urban areas. In the classroom, mainly the native language dominates the whole teaching process, including the bilateral activities between the teachers and students. Therefore it is quite natural the compensation strategies, such as using mime, gesture, circumlocution and synonym are employed less frequently in such condition. In addition, according the former's research, we know the integrative motivation and social-group- identification motivation is stronger for the urban students, which makes them pay much more attention to speaking ability. For this reason whenever they meet with some barriers in communicating with others, they always manage to reach the goal by some ways, such as using body language or circumlocution or synonym.

As to the social strategies, the result shows that the urban students use them more frequently than the rural ones. Maybe this is related to their learning surroundings. Naturally, there are much more chances for the urban students in spite of in the classroom or out of it to cooperate with the proficient language users, besides, it is their integrative and social-group-identification motivation that spur them to employ some more social strategies, such as empathizing with others and so on.

## **4. Conclusion and implication**

This paper is motivated by the question of how learning strategies are used by the high school students and what difference exist between the urban and rural high school students in using the learning strategies. Based on Oxford's learning strategy framework, we carried out this investigation. After conducting the data by SPSS 10.0, results are as follows: Among the six learning strategies, the most used strategies are affective strategies (3.569), then metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and compensation strategies. The least used strategies by the subjects are social strategies. What's more, the research results show that the urban students, compared to the rural ones, do better in using all the strategies. But through T- test analysis we can find that there is only significant difference in the using of compensation and social strategies between them and no evident distinction exists between the two groups when using metacognitive, cognitive, affective and memory strategies. In a word, the general frequency of the subjects' learning strategies selection and use is not satisfying, which should be caused more attention by the educators. And meanwhile, such results also tell us a lesson that both in the rural high school and the urban one learning strategies training should be regarded as one crucial round of the teaching activities and accordingly some effective measures should be taken to promote the students' learning strategy selection and use consciously. Only by this way can the English achievements of the high school students be improved greatly.

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Table 1. The mean and standard deviation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
metacognitive strategies	531	10	63	3.430	5.30
cognitive strategies	531	12	62	3.379	5.34
memory strategies	531	17	70	3.276	5.43
compensation strategies	531	14	72	3.089	6.22
affective strategies	531	10	50	3.569	5.27
social strategies	531	10	49	2.733	6.53

Table 2. the mean and std-deviation

		N	Mean	Std Deviation
metacognitive strategies	urban	263	3.298	5.28
	rural	268	3.272	5.42
cognitive strategies	urban	263	3.331	5.14
	rural	268	3.228	5.31
memory strategies	urban	263	3.191	5.38
	rural	268	3.169	6.49
compensation strategies	urban	263	3.229	5.72
	rural	268	3.017	5.27
affective strategies	urban	263	3.511	5.79
	rural	268	3.448	5.96
social strategies	urban	263	2.861	6.50
	rural	268	2.603	6.51

Table 3. Levene's test for equality of variances

		Levene's Test for equality of variances	
		F	Sig.
metacognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.272	.260
	Equal variances not assumed		
cognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.367	.243
	Equal variances not assumed		
memory strategies	Equal variances assumed	.576	.448
	Equal variances not assumed		
compensation strategies	Equal variances assumed	7.609	.006
	Equal variances not assumed		
affective strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.312	.238
	Equal variances not assumed		
social strategies	Equal variances assumed	5.200	.020
	Equal variances not assumed		

Table 4. T-test for equality of mean

		T-test for equality of mean			
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
metacognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.272			.260
	Equal variances not assumed				
cognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.367			.243
	Equal variances not assumed				
memory strategies	Equal variances assumed	.576			.448
	Equal variances not assumed				
compensation strategies	Equal variances assumed	7.609			.006
	Equal variances not assumed				
affective strategies	Equal variances assumed	1.312			.238
	Equal variances not assumed				
social strategies	Equal variances assumed	5.200			.020
	Equal variances not assumed				



## Student Experiences of English Language Training: A Comparison of Teaching in UK and Chinese Contexts

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### Abstract

The UK, with its obvious advantages such as a good range of universities offering many different courses, and the opportunity to increase competence in English usage, has become one of the most popular countries for Chinese students. However, Chinese students who want to come to the universities in the UK to study have to meet the entry requirements of English language. So, both in the UK and China, various English language training centers appeared to provide similar English training courses to help international students to improve their English in order to meet the entry requirements of the universities in a short time. This research is conducted in this area to compare the English training programs between these two countries to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of these two types of programs in order to help the educators in this area to improve the effective teaching of the English training course.

**Keywords:** English language training, English teaching, Comparison

### 1. Introduction

The UK, with its obvious advantages such as a good range of universities offering many different courses, and the opportunity to increase competence in English usage, has become one of the most popular countries for Chinese students. There are a lot of world famous universities in the UK which shows the high quality of education in this country. In many fields, such as mass media, finance, and fashion design, the UK is in a leading position in the world. On the other hand, the UK is the best place for Chinese students to study English which is the most popular language around the world and one which is widely used in areas such as academia and business and commerce. Studying in the UK, students can learn knowledge, skills and English language at the same time, so, Chinese students prefer the UK as the most ideal place for their higher education.

However, Chinese students who want to come to the universities in the UK to study have to meet the entry requirements of English language. The standards are set through the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examination and students have to be able to demonstrate their competence through this assessment procedure. The level required depends upon the course to be taken, with IELTS scores needing to be higher for those undertaking masters level degrees.

English is a compulsory subject in high schools and universities under the order of the Ministry of Education from the founding of New China in 1949, after the economic reform and opening of China in 1978 and 1979, the learning of English has become fashionable in China (He Qixin). However, the shortage of an environment which enables effective practice in English to be provided has an impact upon the pace at which students can become confident or competent. Chinese students learn English as a kind of knowledge instead of a tool. Thus, generally speaking, most of Chinese students' English is still in a lower stage.

Nowadays, in China, numerous English language training centers all over the country, either individual or affiliated with universities or other institutions of learning, are offering a great variety of English courses for people from all walks of life (He Qixin), including a plenty of English training schools which aim to help Chinese students to ensure that they can reach the required standards for academic purposes of the universities in the UK. Same to China, various English language training centers appeared in the UK and, at the same time, the universities in the UK provide similar English training courses to help international students to improve their English in order to meet the entry requirements of the universities in a short time.

This research is conducted in this area to compare the English training programs between these two countries. The purpose of this research is not to judge which English program is better than the other, but to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of these two types of programs in order to help the educators in this area to improve the effective teaching of the English training course.

## 2. Research Methodologies

The study is focused on the advantages and disadvantages of the language training programs between the UK and China. The purpose of this research is to describe and interpret the events of the project and to share the findings with teachers and others who may have an interest in this area. The project may be described as interpretative and is built around the collection of qualitative data. Because of the small sample size it will not be possible to generalize findings, but the information gathered would be useful to inform the tutors and students who are considering participation in an English language course. This research uses questionnaires and interviews as its main strategies. Eighteen Chinese students who have English language training experiences both in the UK and China are selected for the questionnaires and interviews. Both English and Chinese versions were provided to the students in case these students have language problems in understanding the questions. And they were told they could choose either English or Chinese to answer the questions in the questionnaire and the interview.

The strengths of using questionnaires relate to their ease of application. They are easily sent out and can provide access to both quantitative and qualitative data. Their weakness resides in the fact that it is not possible to push the respondent for further information and that it is possible for the researcher to misinterpret the information provided. (Robson, 1995) So it is important to follow up the questionnaires with interviews which would enable the research to probe and prompt for further information. The same questions were asked of all respondents, although the emphasis was different for each one. However, interviews also have their limitations, such as, particularly, the translation and interpretation from mandarin to English, and the transcription and analysis process can be time demanding and requires the careful production of coding procedures.

The documents, such as teaching materials, practice materials, tapes and so on, which related to the English language training program in the UK and China were examined to get the view of teaching and learning in the programs.

In order to conduct this study a number of ethical factors were taken in to account. The purpose of the study was explained to all students who were sent a questionnaire. The students selected for interview were informed about the purpose of the interview and asked if they were willing to be interviewed. The data collection process did not begin until this informed consent had been obtained. All the students were surveyed and interviewed remain anonymous. No students are named in this report and all have been provided with an opportunity to examine this work prior to submission.

## 3. Findings

The questionnaire was designed to ask for the basic data in the research. According to the data from the questionnaires, in the 18 students who were given questionnaires, 14 students (78 per cent) had taken English training courses for 3 months or more than 3 months when they were in China and 16 students (89 per cent) had taken English training courses in the UK for 3 months or more than 3 months, which means most of the students who were selected to be given the questionnaires had spend quite long time in the English training courses and they should have quite enough experiences of being trained in English training courses both in the UK and China. Thus, they were able to know the English training courses well and provide convincing information which made the data I got from questionnaires more valid.

From the analysis of the questionnaires, in the 18 students who were given questionnaires, 12 students (67 per cent) had attended the English training courses in order to meet the entry requirement of English universities when they were in China. As the results, 11 students (61 per cent) thought the training courses helped them reach their aims or provided a great help for the IELTS test. Totally, 12 of the 18 students (67 per cent) thought the English training courses they had taken in China were 'good' or 'very good'.

On the other hand, in the 18 students who were given questionnaires, 13 students (72 per cent) expected to meet the entry requirement of English universities by attending the English training courses in the UK. Different with the results before, only 7 students (39 per cent) felt the English training courses helped them with their aims of improving their IELTS scores. However, it did not mean that the English training courses in the UK were worse than the training courses in China. Although many students who attended the training courses with the aims of meeting the entry requirement of English universities thought the courses didn't help them reach their traditional aims, they felt they gained a lot in others aspects. 7 students (39 per cent) chose 'to prepare for academic courses in an English university' as their first choice. These students believed the training courses in the UK helped them know a lot about the teaching and learning style in the UK, on the other hand, they thought their listening and speaking were improved during the training period, both of which help them with academic studying in an English university afterwards. Totally, 13 of the 18 students (72 per cent) gave 'good' or 'very good' to the English training courses they had taken in the UK.

The interviewees were asked to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the English training courses both in the UK and China. According to the data from the interviews, the comments were put into four main categories: the advantages of learning English in the Chinese system; the disadvantages of learning English in the Chinese system; the



advantages of learning English in the English system; the disadvantages of learning English in the English system.

### *3.1 Advantages of learning English in the Chinese system*

As Chinese students who were learning English as a second language, some of the students thought it was much easier for them to learn a foreign language with the help of their native language. Especially for learners in the lower level, the explanations and analysis in Chinese would help them understand the problems more efficiently:

I prefer learning English in China because I can talk with my teachers freely and ask for their help with my weak points. But, it is hard for me to do the same thing to the teachers in the training courses in the UK because my English is not good enough to explain my problems to the teachers.

Some of interviewees felt the Chinese teachers' teaching was easier to be accepted by Chinese students because all the Chinese teachers had their own experiences of learning English as a second language. So the Chinese teachers should be very clear about the problems which most of Chinese students would meet in their learning. Moreover, the teachers who were teaching English training courses in China had quite lot experiences of teaching Chinese students. They knew Chinese students' learning style and the situations students were facing in learning a second language. Thus, the teachers could combine their own experiences of English learning and teaching together to provide the effective teaching for the students:

The teachers were professional and good experienced. They knew the problems we would meet when we between English and Chinese. They often focused on explaining the hard points and common mistakes to us when they were teaching. They always reminded us about tense, articles and plural forms, which our Chinese students often felt confused when we made a sentence. When I paid more attention on these points, I made less and less mistakes.

The interviewees had different ideas about the teaching style which only focuses on examination skills in English training courses in China. Some of the students thought this kind of practice only brought students too much pressure by training students doing a plenty of exercises with exam skills, which were useless for students to improve their English abilities. However, some of the students gave high marks to the training courses because they thought such a practice method was good for them to improve their IELTS scores in a very short time. Since the interviewees attended the English training courses for meeting the entry requirement of English universities, they preferred the training courses which could help them with their aim of improving IELTS scores:

After I took the English training course which focused on IELTS test in China, I had known much about IELTS. My speed of answering IELTS paper had improved so much. Although the training course improved my exam skills more than my English ability, it was really helpful for me because I had to meet the entry requirement of English universities within several months. With the exam skills I had got in training course, my IELTS score improved about 1.5 point in three months.

### *3.2 Disadvantages of learning English in the Chinese system*

Jenkins (2002) has argued that English is spoken in every part of the world, both among speakers within a particular country who share a first language, and across speakers from different countries. So native speaker accents are not necessarily the most intelligible or appropriate accents when a non-native speaker is communicating with another non-native speaker. However, as I know, the goal of pronunciation teaching has been to enable students to acquire an accent that is as close as possible to that of a native speaker up to now in China. According to the interviews, most interviewees believed that pronunciation was the most facilitative to communication. They were eager to speak like native speakers with traditional accents. So, when they met teachers who had pronunciation problems in English training courses which were hard to avoid in China, they would not be satisfied with the courses and felt disappointed to the courses in China:

Of course it was a problem. One of my English teachers' pronunciations was not good which influenced me more or less though I only attended her courses for two months. It is hard for me to communicate with native speakers if I have pronunciation problems. We would not understand each other. Language is a tool for us to communicate with others. If I can't do it, so what do I learn English for?

Most of interviewees presented that, in China, the students could only be given the speech dominated education by a teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on rote memory. They all agreed with the point that such a teaching style in English training courses was outdated and boring:

Now, when I have experienced various flexible teaching styles, I think the teaching style in the training course in China is too behind the time.

They only emphasized on the rote memory of grammar and vocabulary which were so boring and useless I thought. What I could do was only reading and writing even if I had done all the things teachers asked me to do. I hoped I could talk with native speakers, but my listening and speaking were so poor.

Some of interviewees thought the teaching method of focusing on exam skills in English training courses were good for them to improve the IELTS scores in very short time. On the other hand, some of interviewees believed those students were only trained to answer various questions on exam papers with exam techniques. Students learned to analyze the question makers' thoughts instead of improve their English abilities. These students argued about the meaning of such kind of method in English training courses in China:

I don't want to spend so much money and time to do such a meaningless thing. If I attended an English training course, I should have only one aim which was to improve my English... Even if I could get higher mark in IELTS test which brought me an offer of an English university, I have no ability to finish my academic course when I study there. If I can't meet the entry requirement of English universities, the only thing I should do is to improve my English ability instead of the ability of guessing answers.

### *3.3 Advantages of learning English in the UK system*

15 of 18 interviewees thought they had learned much more culture things than language when they studied in the English training courses in the UK which could not be gained in the training courses in China. Especially, the students thought they got ideas about teaching and learning styles in the UK training courses that could help them with their academic courses in the universities.

In the English training courses in China, the teacher's role was basically that of instructor and knowledge transmitter. In this case teachers pay more attention to generality of students and the student individuality cannot be considered very sufficiently.

Different with China, the English training courses in the UK used Student-centred approaches. The interviewees pointed out that, in this system, teachers provided more flexible teaching methods to reach every student in a group and paid more attention to the individuality of students. The students often were encouraged to participate in the learning process through small-group discussions, seminars, student-centred team projects, and student/faculty researches when they were taking the training courses:

I think the course was very good because it got me ready for my academic courses in the university... When I just came here (the UK), I suffered the totally strange class, different teaching and learning styles. After the three months training in the English training course in the UK, I was used to such kinds of teaching and learning styles, such as group discussions and team works in the classes. And I think these teaching methods made the classes more effective and interesting... This English training course prepared me well to my study afterwards.

Besides the various teaching methods mentioned above, the small sized classes and seats in circles gave Chinese students a deep impression when they attended the English training courses in the UK:

Sitting in circles is great. It is easier for me to concentrate in the classes. Every student has equal chances of learning... In the small sized classes, teachers pay more attention on each student. I can draw the teachers' attentions and get help in the classes easily.

9 of the interviewees mentioned they felt easy to communicate with the teachers in the English training courses in the UK because these teachers were very kind and more like friends to them. Much freedom and less pressure made the students enjoy the courses very much:

Nice teachers here I think. They are more like friends. We can chat with them freely. They are different with the teachers in China whom are so serious and strict to us students. I feel relax when I am taking a class.

Zhou Jie (1999) suggests that oral English learning is mainly a matter of practice but not a matter of teaching. This is to say, the use of language is more important than knowing about the usage of language. All the interviewees agreed that the English training centers in the UK had an obviously advantage of providing a perfect English environment for the English learners to use the language. When a student attended an English training course in the UK, he/she lived in an English world, in which he/she had plenty of chances to practice his/her English speaking and listening:

My listening and speaking of English had improved rapidly since I had taken the English training course in the UK. In the class, the English was the only language could be used to talk with teachers. After the class, I still had to speak English with some of my classmates, housemates and workmates. At first, it was hard for me to open my mouth to speak English. I felt frustrated most of the time. By and by, I found it became easier and easier for me.

In the UK, English is all around. When you watch TV, listen to the radio, even listen to the others' chatting on the bus, you practice your English listening.

### *3.4 Disadvantages of learning English in the UK system*

17 of the 18 interviewees were identical in the views that the English teachers in the UK did not know Chinese students' learning style and could not help them exactly with their weak points of learning, though they had perfect pronunciation and English proficiency. Zhou Jie (1999) presents that, undoubtedly, a good English teacher should be a good English

speaker. Many native English speakers have proven to be successful teachers in the English training classes in China. However, this does not necessarily mean a good English speaker is a good English teacher. A qualified and sympathetic teacher must have a full understanding of his/her students' needs and interests as well. If a teacher doesn't know his/her teaching subjects (students) well, he/she is sure not to succeed in English classes. Most of the interviewees were acutely aware of their barriers in learning English in the UK were the differences of teaching and learning styles between the UK and China:

I am a girl who has been educated in the traditional Chinese system for about twenty years. It was hard for me to cope with the teaching and learning styles in the UK. During my English training course, I felt the class had no system and the content of the class were so disordered. I could learn nothing from the course and I could not get help from the teachers though I talked with them for several times. They were very nice teachers, they were kind and patient, but they didn't get my point exactly.

The teachers in the training course had no idea about what I wanted. They had no experience of learning English as a second language and they didn't know what the problems we were facing in English learning, so they didn't know how to help us.

Snell (1999) points out that, in China, most students are taught to listen and not to question a teacher in class, and Chinese students have little experience in in-class interaction with the teacher, such as questioning or commenting or giving feedback. So, when an English teacher in the UK deals with some passive Chinese students in the class, they will find a problem: the students are unresponsive and avoid interaction with the teacher.

6 interviewees mentioned that the English teachers in the UK were not satisfied with the performances of Chinese students in the class because Chinese students didn't show their interests and attention by asking and answering questions. On the other hand, the Chinese students were unhappy with such comments:

I am usually taught to be quiet and respectfully listen to the teacher and not to question the teacher in China. I am just not well prepared for such kind of interaction which is expected by the teachers here (the UK). I know it is hard for the teachers to deal with such a passive student as well. But I hope they can understand I am trying my best.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research has been conducted to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the English training system both in the UK and China in order to help the educators in this area to improve the effective teaching of the English training course. Although the research is small scale and the findings are therefore limited, nevertheless it offers some insight which is useful for the educators who want to improve the English training course in both of countries. Bassey (1995) has discussed the concept of fuzzy generalization in which the findings from studies such as this cannot be widely generalised, but from which it will be possible to make some suppositions. These could be tested through further research and therefore this research may be seen as hypothesis generating rather than conclusive.

According to the results of the research, the students preferred the teachers in the UK who talked with students just like friends. An equal and friendly communication in the class can make the students feel less pressure and enjoy the learning. In addition, with both their own experiences of learning English as a second language, Chinese English teachers are familiar with the Chinese students' learning habits and the problems they meet when they are between two languages. In this case, Chinese English teachers can focus the lesson on emphasizing these problems and help the students with the weak points they are facing in their English learning.

In the research, some of the students feel bored about the speech dominated education by teacher-centered, book-centered and grammar-centered. So using the student-centred teaching methods, such as group discussion, team project and group seminars and so on, to make the lessons more flexible and enjoyable is essential. Based on the culture and concepts of education in China, encouraging the students to make more interactions in the class is more important. As the first step, teachers would begin with encouraging the students to answer the questions voluntarily in the class.

Some of the students complained that the teachers in China focused on grammar and vocabulary too much and paid less attention on listening and speaking practice. As China is a non-English-speaking country, the students who are learning English in China have no good environment and many chances to practice their English listening and speaking now and then. Teachers would suggest the students to practice listening by listening to the English broadcast and watching English movies and TV programmes, and speaking by making conversation with other English learners or native speakers.

As for the grammar and vocabulary, both of them are very important in English learning. The focus on these items is necessary. Teachers just need to teach them with more effective practice methods. Although the grammar-centred method is out of favour, students accustomed to this method may still derive benefit from it. For example, Chinese students generally show great interest in language structures and linguistic details when they are learning a language. "We would like to know what happens, because if we understand the system, we can use English more effectively"

(Harvey 1985). Therefore, in teaching English to Chinese students, appropriate grammar analysis is essential, especially for beginners. However, instead of teaching grammar traditionally and drilling grammar patterns, relating the teaching of grammar and pattern drills to meaning and use should be a better way.

At last, sitting in circles is a very good method to draw the students' concentration in the class, but it is more workable in small sized classes. In China, although some English training schools have made the class size smaller, in most of the English training centers, especially the very popular ones, the big class is still the norm. It is hard for a teacher to control the number of the students. Anyway, as a teacher, one would try the best to pay more attention to every student and help them as much as they could.

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