# ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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# Teachers' Voice vs. Students' Voice: A Needs Analysis Approach

# to English for Acadmic Purposes (EAP) in Iran

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**Abstract**

EAP plays a highly important role in countries where English is used mainly for academic purposes.   However, EAP programs have been developed without conducting a systematic needs analysis from both the students' and instructors' perspective. The purpose of this study is to describe the perception that EAP students and instructors have of the problematic areas in EAP programs. A total of 693 EAP students majoring in different academic fields and 37 instructors participated in this study. Survey information included respondents' perception the importance of problematic areas in EAP programs.   The results show discrepancy between the perceptions of EAP learners in different academic fields and between learners and instructors. The study has implications for curriculum design and instructional delivery of EAP courses for college level students.

**Keywords**: English as a foreign language, English for academic purposes, Teachers' voice, Students' voice, Needs analysis, EAP methodology

## 1. Introduction

Due to the status of English as an international language and advancements in technology in recent years, there has been a worldwide increase in demand for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses varying in length and the mode of instruction (Jordan, 1997). EAP is needed not only for educational studies in countries where English is the mother tongue, but also in other countries where English is the medium of instruction in the higher.

In expanding circle countries like Iran, where English is mainly used for academic purposes, EAP plays a highly important role. Additionally, in Iran, after the Islamic revolution, in an effort to defy westernization of the country, there has been a strong tendency to teach EAP, which is perceived to be a variety of English that can be somewhat separated from the dominant culture attached to it. EAP has increasingly expanded so that it currently forms a considerable part of the curricula for all academic fields at universities (Eslami, Eslami-Rasekh, & Quiroz, 2007).

Despite the government's high level of investment in EAP programs, there is very limited research (exceptions are: Atai, 2000; Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh, 2004; Gooniband, 1988; Khajeie, 1993; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008) addressing the effectiveness of these programs from learners' and instructors' perspectives. Current EAP practice is largely ad-hoc, lacking in course design, teacher training, sufficient instruction time, and proper evaluation. The challenges will necessarily involve developing true specific-purpose curricula based on learners' needs which would provide the appropriate context for sustainable language programs. More specifically, learners' and teachers' voices on the effectiveness of these programs, problems faced, and the use of textbooks produced and published locally is not heard.

The objective of the study is to examine Iranian EAP learners' perceptions with regard to the problematic areas in EAP programs compared to instructors' perceptions. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1) What are the EAP instructors' perceptions of the importance of problematic areas in EAP classes?

2) What are the EAP students' perceptions of the importance of problematic areas in EAP classes?

3) Are there any significant differences between the learners' perceptions in different academic fields?

4) Are there any significant differences between the learners' perceptions and their instructors?

## 2. Needs analysis

Assessment of needs from the individual learner's perspective is an important part of any instructional program design and it can benefit both teachers and students alike (Lytle, 1988). The learner-centered approach to language learning builds on the premise that teaching/learning programs should be responsive to learners' needs (Hutchinson & Waters,

1987; Robinson,1991; Savignon & Wang, 2003). As Hamp-Lyons (2001) points out, EAP begins with the learner and the situation, whereas General English begins with the language. English for Academic Purposes curriculum development is guided by learner needs leading to a research area known as 'needs analysis' or 'needs assessment'. Hence, the needs analysis initiates and guides EAP curriculum development, involving surveying the learners to collect data on their background and goals, linguistic and behavioral demands, and preferred learning/teaching strategies (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999). Students' needs assessment remains elemental to EAP (Allison et al., 1994; Brinton et al., 1989; Dudley-Evans, 1998; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Jordan, 1997) and the unifying feature of any EAP course is the definition of objectives and content of each course according to learners' functional needs in the target language and how the students are expected to perform in conforming to the norms and conventions of their academic disciplines.

Needs assessment should be considered as an on-going process designed to gather and analyse information about the target language needs of learners in an existing or proposed setting and to find out whether the program's objectives and the learners' requirements are being achieved and for planning the learners' and the program's future directions and making informed decisions (Purpura & King, 2003; Santopietro & Peyton, 1991).

An important question in relation to needs analysis is how the notion of 'need' is to be conceptualized. According to Brindley (1989: 65) the main source of the ambiguity in the concept of language needs is the distinction between various concepts of need, namely the distinction between *necessities* or *demands*, and learners' *wants* and the methods of bridging the gap between these two. Similarly, Berwick (1989) defines 'need' as a measurable discrepancy or the gap between the existing conditions and the desired future state. Benesch (1996) believes that we need to go beyond the descriptive approach to needs analysis and consider critical needs analysis. Critical needs analysis acknowledges the existing demands but considers the target situation demands as a site of possible reform. Benesch believes that needs analysis has so far surrendered to the domination of the institutes and authorities and suggests that we need to consider needs analysis as a political and subjective process and EAP classrooms as a site of struggle. Critical needs analysis assumes that institutions are hierarchical and those at the bottom are entitled to more power than they have and therefore areas where greater equality might be achieved should be explored.

It is highly important to consider the 'need' in relation to the unique characteristics of the educational context in which the study takes place (Holmes & Celani, 2006). Students' needs in different contexts are diverse and the analysis of needs can be effective if the academic language needs are accurately defined and seek utmost specificity within the specific target use (Deutch, 2003). It is based on this assertion that we will embark on analyzing the problems EAP students and instructions face in Iranian EAP programs.

## 3. The Iranian context

Prior to the change of government in 1979 in Iran, the British council had sponsored a major ESP materials initiative which generated many textbooks targeted for Iranian students in tertiary education. In the early 1960s joint projects between Iranian universities and Western academic centers (Cowan, 1974; Bates, 1978) with a focus on teaching English to engineering and medical students were implemented. Several discipline-specific English textbooks were published during this time.

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978), there has been a systematic move supervised by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) to establish uniform discipline-based EAP programs for universities. This move has led to the compilation of several ESP textbooks for students of medicine, engineering, science, social sciences, humanities, law, geography, agriculture and other academic fields. The purpose of these programs is to provide courses more closely geared to the learners' needs in special fields of study, and in so doing to enhance the students' level of motivation and interest. However, since the courses were not designed based on any systematic needs analysis, the program designer's goals do not seem to have been fulfilled (Atai, 2000; Eslami et al., 2007; Farhady & Hedayati, 2009; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008; Tahririan, 1990).

The EAP curriculum for all university students includes one to three EAP courses which are either taught by English or content area instructors. These courses are three credit courses and taught three hours per week. The first course is 'General English' and the other two courses (three credit hours each) get increasingly more discipline-specific. The main purpose for teaching EAP is to facilitate the academic English level of students to enable them to read discipline-specific texts in English, be present at conferences, and/or translate the English texts into Persian. An important section of the graduate entrance exam is students' level of competence in their related EAP field.

There is high uniformity in all the textbooks as far as the structure, organization, and subsections are concerned and there is a noticeable emphasis on developing reading skills. They commonly include reading excerpts related to the students' academic fields followed by exercises on reading comprehension skills, vocabulary and word analysis exercises, and short paragraphs for translation.

Despite the uniformity in the teaching materials, EAP practice is mainly ad hoc, lacking in course design, systematic needs analysis, teacher education, proper evaluation and systematic research on the effectiveness of these programs

(Atai, 2000; Eslami et al., 2007; Farhady & Hedayati, 2009; Gooniband 1988; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008). Therefore, careful examination of the attitudes and perceptions of learners and instructor is seen to be important in determining the success of EAP programs.

The present study was therefore carried out in order to broaden the scope of studies undertaken so far in the area of students' and instructors' perceptions of their language learning needs and to analyze the perception of EAP learners from different though related academic backgrounds in relation to the problematic areas in EAP.

**4. Methodology**

*4.1. Participants*

*Students*

Because of practical limitations, the researchers used nonprobability sample designs (Cohen & Manion, 1994) to select the student population for this study. More specifically, 'quota sampling', which is the nonprobability equivalent of stratified sampling (Nachmias & Nachmias 1981) was used. Moreover, since specific academic disciplines are shown to affect the needs of the students (Ferris & Tagg,1996), the student's field of study was used as an important criterion for sampling (Table 1). There were 393 females and 300 males in the sample. Their ages ranged from 20 to 25 years and they were all undergraduates.

The students were enrolled in the EAP courses in the academic year of 2005-2006. The sample was taken from Esfahan University, Iran University of Science and Technology, Esfahan University of Technology, and Tehran University. Medical students were selected from the medical Universities of Tehran and Esfahan.

*Instructors*

The instructors sample included the instructors (ELT experts and subject-matter experts) who taught EAP courses at the universities included in our students' sample. Their age was between 28 and 55 years and their experience in teaching English at university level ranged from three to 19 years. Only 33% of the instructors were PhD holders. The rest were MA or MSc holders. Fifty-one percent of the instructors reported their specialty to be in TEFL, English literature, or linguistics, and 41% reported to be subject-matter instructors.

*4.2. The questionnaire*

The questionnaire used in this study was a modified version of the one used by Atai (2000), and Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004). In addition to some demographic information, students' rank ordering of the importance of different language skills to their academic and professional goals, frequency of different instructional activities used in their classes, and their perceived importance of different problematic areas in EAP courses were included.

To ensure the appropriateness and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items, four instructors were consulted, six classroom observations were conducted and a general discussion was held in three EAP classes. To make sure that students understand the items in the questionnaire, students' native language (Persian) was used. The questionnaire was piloted with 30 students and 5 instructors representative of the actual participants of the study. Based on the results, and the students' comments, the questionnaire was modified and finalized for the large-scale data collection.

The students' questionnaire consisted of 53 items and was divided into four parts. Part A of the questionnaire contained items asking about participants' demographic information.  Part B of the questionnaire contained 21 items related to the perception of the importance of language skills, language components, and instructional activities. The items were ranked on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Part C (13 items) asked students to specify how frequently different instructional activities were used in their classes ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Part D included 19 items and asked about the importance of different problems in the EAP programs based on a ranking scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). The items for problematic areas in EAP instruction in Iran were based on the findings of previous studies, classroom observations and general discussions held in three EAP classes. The questionnaire was distributed to the students either by the researchers or the instructors in their classes. In this paper we only cover part D (19 items) of the questionnaire which focuses on the importance of different problems in the EAP programs from students vs. instructors perspective. For the findings related to other 3 parts of the survey refer to Eslami et al. (2007).

The questionnaire for the faculty members was slightly different from that of the students. In Part A demographic information related to the instructors was elicited. In Part B the perceptions of the faculty members concerning the importance of language skills and components to students' studies and careers were elicited. The last part of the faculty members' questionnaire (Part C) asked for their perceptions of the importance of different problems in EAP instruction and implementation. The instructors' perceptions regarding the frequency of use of different instructional activities was not elicited because the result of the pilot study showed that what the instructors report was highly different from what was observed in their classes which, according to Dörnyei (2003), is evidence of the desirability effect. Of the 72 copies of the questionnaires delivered to the instructors, 51% completed and returned the survey to the researchers.

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of instruments and each subscale were estimated as shown in Table 2. All the reliability coefficients were high enough (higher than 0.80) to enable the researchers to conduct statistical analyses of the entire questionnaires and their subscales.

## 5. Data analysis

Statistical procedures employed include descriptive statistics for various items on the survey to examine overall frequencies, totals, percentages, means, and standard deviations. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine whether there were significant mean differences based on the students' field of the study. Mann-Whitney *U* tests were used to examine the differences between the students' responses and those of the instructors.

### 5.1. Results

In the following subsections the results of the data analysis are presented in relation to the research questions and the two main groups of participants. We will first explore the result of the students' perception of the importance of different problems in EAP instruction. Then, we examine the students' perception in different fields of study to find out if the problems are perceived differently based on the students' field of study. Following the students' section, the result of the instructors' questionnaire will be presented and compared with that of students.

a) *Students' perceptions of problems in EAP courses*

Table 3 summarizes the participants' responses to the items in this section and shows the significant differences based on ANOVA results. The results show that students did not perceive the instructors' low level of language proficiency and content knowledge to be highly important (mean range of 2-3). Furthermore, low content knowledge of instructors was perceived to be a significantly more important problem by students in medicine (M = 2.87) and engineering (M = 2.75) than by students in humanities (2.25).

In contrast, 65-75% of the students selected a *most important* (5)*,* or *important* (4) ranking for their own low English language proficiency. Students' low level of language proficiency was perceived to be a significantly more important problem by students in humanities (M = 4.55), and engineering (M = 4.02) than medicine (M = 3.58). Limited vocabulary, slow reading speed, poor listening, speaking, writing and reading comprehension, boring classes, access to the Internet, and lack of instructors' emphasis on the use of the Internet were ranked by the majority (67%-87%) either as *important* or *highly important.*

The students ranked problems with overcrowded classes, excessive use of translation activities, lack of audio-visual facilities and outdated materials relatively high, (mean range of 3.78-3.75). Excessive use of translation activities was perceived as significantly more important by students in medicine (M = 3.98) and engineering (M = 3.89) than students in humanities (M = 3.01). Similarly, the use of outdated textbooks was ranked as significantly more important by students in engineering (M = 3.71) than students in medicine (M = 3.19).

Lack of student involvement in class activities (teacher-centered classes) was ranked relatively high as well (mean range of 3.77-4.55). Students in humanities perceived this to be a significantly more important problem (M = 4.55), than students in medicine (M = 4.03) or engineering (M = 4.01). This could be related, again, to the low English proficiency of students in humanities and consequently the lower use of student-centered activities by teachers.

Finally, the vast majority (75%) of the students ranked a negative attitude toward English as least important (1) and 25% marked the low importance ranking (2)**.** In the following section we will present the result of the instructors questionnaire of related issues.

As the results show, there were both similarities and differences in the perception of students in different academic fields. The explanation and implications of the findings will be presented in the conclusion section. We now embark on presenting the perception of instructors and the differences between instructors' perception compared to students'.

b) *Instructors' Perceptions of Major Problems in Current EAP Instruction*

Instructors perceived the low level of students' language proficiency to be significantly more important than the students themselves (Table 4 below). Limited vocabulary, negative attitudes toward English, lack of availability of audio-visual materials, and outdated textbooks and materials were other areas in which there was a significant different between the instructors and the students. Instructors perceived these problems as being more important than students did.

What is notable is that instructors did not perceive teacher-centered classes to be as highly important as students with a significant difference between the two groups. Similarly, students' ranking of boring classes and excessive use of translation activities as problematic areas was significantly higher than instructors' ranking.

On the other hand, instructors perceived the lack of student involvement and participation in class activities to be significantly more important than students (Instructors, M = 4.91, Students, M = 4.18). A likely explanation is that since

faculty members believe students do not participate in class activities as much as they should, and with the students' low English language proficiency, more teacher-centered classes are required to effectively teach large EAP classes.

As shown above, a divergence of opinions between these two groups was noted. We will move to the concluding remarks and the implications of this study for EAP programs.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings have demonstrated both the complex network of elements which play a significant role in determining the needs of EAP students in Iran, and the unavoidable necessity to set priorities.

The findings of the study support the view that the students 'greatly' need to increase their general proficiency in English. Students' low level of language proficiency was perceived to be a significantly more important problem by students in humanities, and engineering than medicine. Limited vocabulary, slow reading speed, poor listening, speaking, writing and reading comprehension, boring classes, access to the Internet, and lack of instructors' emphasis on the use of the Internet were ranked highly by the majority of the students.

The results show that students prefer learner-centered classes and demand more involvement in class activities. It is possible that teachers' perception of students' low English language proficiency and low motivation leads to teachers' lower use of student-centered activities. Teachers need to make constant efforts to keep up to date with new teaching methods to be able to facilitate interactive classrooms with students of different English proficiency levels. Appropriate institutional support, such as providing professional development, releasing time, and funds for teachers (Parkhurst & Bodwell, 2005) are needed to help familiarize the teachers with the new methodologies.

Our study, similar to other studies in previous research in EAP needs analysis in some other contexts (Robinson, 1991; Ferris 1998) has revealed that there are discrepancies among the perceptions of instructors and students. The results show that instructors may not always be the best judges of students' needs and challenges.

There were also differences among different groups of students based on their field of study. The findings of this study, like those of Atai (2000), Ferris & Tagg (1996), and Mazdayasna & Tahririan (2008) stress the importance of examining the precise needs of students in different academic fields in order to prepare them most effectively for the tasks and expectations that lie ahead of them.

These results, similar to Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh (2004) study of general English students in Iran, demonstrate that although students show more interest in communicative activities, the use of the grammar translation method with a heavy emphasis on grammar and translation is still prominent in Iranian universities. This is an indication that EAP learners in Iran are experiencing a fairly traditional, form-focused L2 education with little opportunity to use English for communicative purposes (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009, p. 140). Instructors did not perceive teacher-centered classes to be as highly important as students with a significant difference between the two groups. Similarly, students' ranking of boring classes and excessive use of translation activities as problematic areas was significantly higher than instructors' ranking. Teachers may therefore need to apply diverse communicative activities in language classrooms to give EAP students opportunities to practice using English in different context and focus more on self-regulated learning.

As Benesch (1996: 736) asserts, needs analysis is a political and subjective process. Critical needs analysis assumes that institutions are hierarchical and those at the bottom are often entitled to more power than they have. Based on this ideology, learners, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy in top-down educational systems such as Iran, need to be given more power and their voices should be heard in order to facilitate reform. Possibilities for change do exist even in the existing structures of the country. Faculty members need to become aware of what their students *demand,* versus what the institutions deem necessary and take action accordingly.

Because needs analysis is by definition context-specific (Ferris, 1998: 314), it is hoped that this study has shed light on the needs of Iranian EAP students from different disciplines and has brought into focus the discrepancies between students' perceptions and instructors' perceptions of students' language learning needs and problems in EAP instruction and delivery.

Our findings revealed that there are many factors one should take into account when designing EAP courses for students in different academic fields. Use of technology and student-centered approaches to teaching are among the highly important issues to consider based on the opinions of EAP students revealed in this study.

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Table 1. Total number and percentage of students in the three academic fields

| Academic Field | Number | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Medicine | 268 | 38.7 |
| Engineering | 223 | 32.2 |
| Humanities | 202 | 29.1 |
| Total | 693 | 100 |

Table 2. Reliability coefficient ( α ) of both instruments and each subscale

| Instruments and their subscale | No. of cases | No. of items | Reliability Coefficient |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students' questionnaire | 693 | 53 | 0.9232 |
| Instructors' questionnaire | 37 | 40 | 0.8771 |
| Language skills, abilities and instructional activities | 730 | 21 | 0.8413 |
| Instructional activities used in classes | 693 | 13 | 0.8593 |
| Existing problems | 730 | 19 | 0.8561 |

Table 3. Students' ranking of the importance of problems in EAP courses

| Problems | Medicine M SD | Engineering M SD | Humanities M SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Low level of language proficiency* | 3.58 1.27 | 4.02 1.22 | 4.55 1.11 |
| 2. Limited vocabulary | 3.71 1.01 | 3.84 1.02 | 3.90 1.09 |
| 3. Slow reading speed | 3.45 1.01 | 3.31 1.08 | 3.53 1.03 |
| 4. Poor reading comprehension | 3.33 .89 | 3.54 .87 | 4.01 .91 |
| 5. Poor listening comprehension | 4.05 1.05 | 4.10 1.24 | 4.23 1.43 |
| 6. Poor speaking ability | 4.32 1.04 | 4.46 .97 | 4.52 1.02 |
| 7. Poor writing ability | 4.33 .98 | 4.07 1.14 | 4.74 1.22 |
| 8. Overcrowded classes | 3.78 1.23 | 3.87 .98 | 4.01 .87 |
| 9. Negative attitude toward English | 1.01 .57 | 1.20 .91 | 1.23 .98 |
| 10. Boring classes | 3.85 1.07 | 3.76 1.01 | 4.05 1.02 |
| 11. Low English proficiency of instructors | 2.98 1.09 | 3.01 .97 | 2.81 1.02 |
| 12. Low content knowledge of instructors* | 2.87 1.11 | 2.75 1.05 | 2.25 .98 |
| 13. Excessive use of translation activities* | 3.98 1.06 | 3.89 1.01 | 3.01 1.07 |
| 14. Lack of availability of audio-visual materials | 4.01 1.05 | 4.08 .95 | 4.07 1.09 |
| 15. Lack of easy access to Internet | 4.39 1.33 | 4.49 1.11 | 4.57 1.08 |
| 16. Lack of the instructor's emphasis on the use of Internet | 3.91 1.07 | 3.87 1.08 | 4.01 .99 |
| 17. Outdated textbooks and materials* | 3.19 1.11 | 3.71 1.06 | 3.01 .97 |
| 18. Teacher-centered classes | 3.77 .97 | 3.96 1.12 | 3.99 1.01 |
| 19. Lack of student involvement and participation in classroom activities* | 4.03 .97 | 4.01 .98 | 4.55 .99 |

* Shows a significant difference between the groups at *p*<.05

Table 4. Instructors' perception of the importance of problems in EAP programs

| Problems | Students M SD | Instructors M SD |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Low level of students' language proficiency* | 4.04 1.19 | 4.55 1.01 |
| 2. Limited vocabulary* | 3.79 1.04 | 4.32 1.02 |
| 3. Slow reading speed | 3.42 1.04 | 3.81 1.08 |
| 4. Poor reading comprehension | 3.62 .87 | 3.91 .87 |
| 5. Poor listening comprehension | 4.11 1.24 | 4.55 .91 |
| 6. Poor speaking ability | 4.43 1.01 | 4.56 .97 |
| 7. Poor writing ability | 4.37 1.10 | 4.41 .91 |
| 8. Overcrowded classes | 3.87 1.02 | 4.45 .98 |
| 9. Negative attitude toward English* | 1.13 .81 | 2.93 .91 |
| 10. Boring classes | 3.78 1.03 | 3.53 1.01 |
| 11. Low English proficiency of instructors | 2.93 1.02 | 3.01 .97 |
| 12. Low content knowledge of instructors | 2.61 1.03 | 2.75 1.05 |
| 13. Excessive use of translation activities | 3.61 1.04 | 3.12 1.01 |
| 14. Lack of availability of audio-visual materials* | 4.05 1.03 | 4.61 .95 |
| 15. Lack of easy access to internet | 4.47 1.16 | 4.67 1.11 |
| 16. Lack of the instructor's emphasis on the use of internet | 3.92 1.04 | 3.87 1.08 |
| 17. Outdated textbooks and materials* | 3.29 1.03 | 3.98 1.06 |
| 18. Teacher-centred classes* | 3.89 1.02 | 3.02 1.12 |
| 19. Lack of student involvement and participation in classroom activities* | 4.18 .98 | 4.91 .98 |

* Shows a significant difference between the groups at $p<.05$

# Facing Finality: Cognitive and Cultural Studies on Death and Dying "Arabic Culture"

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**Abstract**

Semantics is a study of human beings cultural background, has from its beginning as a field of study been concerned with the study of humans understanding of culture. Understanding the meaning of *death* has been of great importance to many of the central theoretical developments in this field, especially as it imposes on studies of social life. However, each society characterizes and consequently treats death and dying in its own individual way that differ obviously. In other words, human question about death is a universal thing, but the answer to that question differs among cultures.

This paper focuses on death understanding in the Arabic culture and how Arabic thinking terms are shaped by cognitive metaphors and their subsequent discourses in death and dying, especially from religious and cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** Semantics, Arabic culture, Cognitive metaphor, Religious and human life understanding of death

**1. Introduction:**

*1.1 Understanding the Meaning of Death in the Arabic Culture*

Despite the fact that Islam is not the only religion practiced in Arabic countries, it is indisputably the most dominant and its belief and practices affect the other religions that are touched by it. Because slam Arab deals very faithfully with the final fate of man. Life, death and dying   instructions were set down in the Qur'an, in addition to a religious work like, the "Book of the Soul" written in the 14th century by the Hanbali theologian Muhammad in Abi-Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah. According to the Qur'an, and other explanations about life and death, Allah creates human beings, determines their life span and causes them to die. It is written the concept of fate is fundamental. The term Islam itself, meaning "surrender," implies an absolute submission to the will of God. (Shokr 2006).

As Muslim belief, when a person dies the Angel of Death (malak al-maut) arrives, sits at the head of the dead person and deal with each soul according to its known works. Evil souls are instructed "to go to the wrath of God," and good souls are instructed "to go to the mercy of God." Both souls are finally returned to their bodies and experience eternal salvation, whichever is applicable.

Another explanation is that death in Islam as an obligatory transitional event in between the 'life before death' and 'life after death'. So the definition of death for a Muslim would be the absolute disappearance of the functions for the time period in between the two lives – one before death and another after death. As a result it ends the eternal and permanent concept or belief of life to the concept of death with the help of the concept of the life after death (Samir 2008).

In our daily life death is related with the biggest stresses due to the knowledge – death ends. But when the question of religion comes, specifically Islam, this knowledge changes for a religious person. So it can be easily assumed that death becomes a less stressful event for a Muslim, (Time has come) when he truly believes in Islam.

In the Arabic culture, one finds much more diversity in thinking of death. Death in the Arabic culture has many meanings. It may mean that one is to stay in heaven or hell. To some, death is a transitory state until the day of al-hesaab, (the day human meet Allah). To others, death is a sleep or rest of life. To the above mentioned explanations, the concentration of this work will be largely on the search for a cognitive metaphorical understanding of death in the

Arabic culture based on the Arabic religion influence. Like other words, how Arabic thinking terms are shaped by cognitive metaphors and their belief in death and dying, especially from cognitive religious perspectives.

*1.2 The Metaphorical Concept of Death*

The theoretical assumptions on which the present work is based are derived from the cognitive model of the conceptual metaphor theory. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), cognitive hypothesis which indicate the existence of a set of metaphorical concepts around which we can conceptualize the world or our worldviews. They emphasized that metaphor is rather a matter of experience or everyday life than merely a matter of language: "Metaphor is a tool so ordinary that we use it unconsciously and automatically… it is irreplaceable: metaphor allows us to understand our selves and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can."

Shokr (2006), Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 6), state that part of "the human conceptual model is metaphorically structured and defined." Therefore, certain parts of our life are conceptualized metaphorically in a systematic way. In the meantime, Lakoff and Johnson offer a wide range of metaphors covering basic aspects of life and death by structuring metaphorically one aspect in terms of another. In addition, the concept of the religious should be largely dependent on metaphorical conceptualization. This realization is due to the fact that it is not only a highly abstract domain quite removed from physical experience, but also its central issues of (God, the soul, the life after, and the freedom of moral choice) have traditionally been regarded as the metaphysical ideas or concepts. The conceptualization of metaphysical ideas through metaphor has been observed by Bible commentators such as Platzner (1996) who asserts that "even the most intricate of metaphoric constructions cannot bridge the cognitive distance between language and divine reality."    Thus, religious discourse should abound with metaphorical expressions.

The current work used the concept of cognitive religious metaphor rather than imaginative metaphor or any type of metaphor. The former metaphor is closely related to life and death while the second is divided into life and novel. The Arab death and dying concept is one of the parts commonly used of the metaphorical concept, for instance "the life after" and therefore it is an example of death conventional metaphor. Dead metaphors are concepts which became common meanings such as (time flies). According to (Kövecses 2002), dead metaphors that may have been alive and dynamic at some point out have become so typical and usual with constant use that by now they have lost their dynamism.

## 2. Death and Dying Conceptual Terms

*2.1 The Term Life after Death (A Journey to Heaven or Hell)*

The concept of life after death in Arabic culture tells us that a human being not only has a body, but also has a 'spirit' given to him or her by God. The spirit is the seed from which a higher form of life grows within man, higher than physical life, just as the body has developed from a small 'seed'. Just as in the world around us higher forms of life evolve from lower ones, similarly from the life of the individual in this world is evolved his higher 'spiritual' life. During life, man's work shapes his spirit, for better or worse, according to his work. When a person dies, the physical body is finished, but the spirit remains, as he or she had molded it by their work when alive. That is the life after death (Mirza 1996).

"We have ordained death among you, and we are not to be overcome, so that we may change your state and make you grow into what you know not." (The Holy Quran 56:60-61).

In the metaphor which responds to this conceptual meaning, the act of dying corresponds to the act of leaving and, concequentally, the dead is obviously the person who goes into life after death which is known as a journey to either heaven or to hell.

"And thus have We, by Our Command, sent inspiration to thee: thou knewest not (before) what was Revelation, and what was Faith; but We have made the (Qur'an) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; and verily thou dost guide (men) to the Straight Way, The Way of Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the Heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allah! (surah 42: verses 52-53) .

"It (hell) is the fire kindled by Allah which rises over the hearts." (104:5-6).

Therefore, metaphorically, the term journey is seen as a result of man's life action, the two cases mentioned in the examples above can be said to convoy good work benefit the spirit and evil work harm it. This effect upon the spirit is what constitutes the journey of reward or punishment for one's work. In the metaphor, heaven and hell are not actual places somewhere in the universe, but really our conceptual correspondence of the condition of the spirit journey resulting from our works. Heaven and hell begin in this life within a person's cognation. Both, feelings of bliss and contentment at doing good, and the guilt, shame and greed are felt by the heaven and the hell in one's metaphorical concept. After death, the heaven or hell that developed in the mind and heart is unfolded before us and becomes the world in which we live, and we live in it not with the physical body of this life but the 'spiritual' body made from our acts.

## 2.2 The Term Death is The End

The concept of the end in the Arabic culture is accepted and understood. It is part of Arab faith in God. When reading the Quran, understanding the end is definitely obvious by the Muslim.    Death is not conceptualized as the final stage of our life time but also as the start of the next life. The role of the current life is to determine the next life (Mirza 1996).

The metaphor of the end is conceptually known as what happens after death and the events at the end of time. In the example that follows, death is viewed as the end of the process of human life and the beginning of the next life but we have no knowledge about it.

"We will raise you into a form of which you have not the slightest knowledge". Surah Al-Waqiah (Ch. 56: V.62).

"Your first creation and your second creation will be identical". Surah Luqman (Ch. 31: V.29).

The death is the end metaphor has the cognitive implication that death is seen as the final of our existence in our earthly life; From time to time we can feel this effect, but only very faintly and vaguely. After death, when only the spirit is left, and rebirth bearing all the impressions of actions done throughout life, the effects of those actions will be felt clearly and vividly. It is this which is the reward for good work and suffering for evil works at the end.

## 2.3 The Term Death is Rest and Harm

This term has both positive and negative metonymic meanings *Antonio (2003); the term death is a rest is metaphorically understood as a relief or peace for the dying person from the endures or the suffering that he or she spent life.

"O soul who is at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well-pleasing (Him). So enter among my servants, and enter my garden."(89:27-30).

This positive metonymic meaning is closely related to the concept of temporal rest or sleep until the Day of Judgment or 'al hesaab". On opposing, the metaphor of death is understood as the meaning of harm of loss. This cognitive meaning has a metonymic basis which focuses on the negative results of death. In the examples that follow death harming metaphor is viewed as people typical grief reactions of losing their lovers, one of their familes, friends etc. in other words, the dying person is absent in the conceptualization , given the fact that the concept of  harming or suffering    emphasized of the survivors rather than focusing on the person that dies.

- **Shock/Disbelieve**

The metonymical meaning of death is conceptualized as a shocked sense that the death has not really happened, not really occurred. This reaction can be intensified and complicated if the death is sudden, violent, or unanticipated. The person mind may be telling him or her "there must be some mistake," or "this can't be true."

- **Anger**

The negative metonymic concept of anger may be conceptualized as anger at people's family members for not rallying together or even anger at ourselves or the person who died and "left" the world or earthly life.

- **Metonymy**

Which means thing or concept is not called by its own name, but by the name of something intimately associated with that thing or concept. it could be up or down, negative or positive concept.etc. Antonio (2003).

- **Sadness**

The negative metaphorical sense of sadness may conceptualize to people experience a deep sense of loss. There may be moments when people find themselves at a loss for words, weeping, or bursting uncontrollably into tears.

- **Fear and Depression**

There may be worry or panic; fears about carrying on, fears about the future. If the person who died was an adult (partner, sibling, parent), it may bring up negative fears or depression about people own sense of mortality or sense of being left behind or people may lose interest in their usual activities, or feel helpless or hopeless.

## 3. Conclusion

The present paper put forward by the Cognitive religious understanding of death Metaphor, where it has shown how the Qur'an is structured around the term life and death process and how every term of death has influenced by the Arabic culture. The idea of death conceived in terms of life after death (a journey to heaven or hell), death is the end and death is rest and harm. The use of such metaphor terms makes the reader clarify and define the relationship between real and image, physical and spiritual (Lakoff and Turner1989). Meanwhile, this paper has the following results:

a. The Arabic culture is not death and dying culture. In fact Death is accepted and understood in the Arabic culture. It is part of their faith in God.

b. The "journey" metaphor in the religious context of the Qur'an is conceptualized as two kinds of life after death: the good spiritual life (heaven) and bad life (hell). The term journey is seen as a result of man's life action.

c. Death is not only conceptualized as the end of our life time but also as the start of the next life.

d. Death has both positive and negative metonymic effects. The positive, conceptualized as the rest of man's suffering and pain during life. And the negative effect is conceptualized the harming or suffering of the survivors rather than focusing on the person that dies.

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# Effect of Explicit Language Learning Strategy Instruction

# on Language-test and Self-assessment Scores

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**Abstract**

The present article reports on the findings of a study that explored the effect of explicit language learning strategy instruction on the development of English as a foreign language within a higher education setting in mixed language ability groups. The research results indicate that explicit language learning strategy instruction that aimed at enhancing language progress in groups of students that were heterogeneous in terms of initial language ability did not have any statistically significant effect on the development of language knowledge. These results indicate that under certain circumstances (limited course time and heterogeneous language competence levels within groups in particular) the organization of strategy training in the form of a separate module or implicit training in the use of language learning strategies seem to be more appropriate.

**Keywords:** Explicit language learning strategy instruction, English as a foreign language, Higher education, Mixed ability groups, Language competence

## 1. Introduction

In Slovenia students enter higher education after having learnt English as a foreign language in most cases for eight years. Despite language learning in the formal school setting and opportunities for the acquisition of English outside the language classroom, before entering higher education many students fail to reach satisfactory levels of language competence that would allow them to upgrade their knowledge of general as well as discipline-specific English. In addition, needs analysis conducted at our faculty (Jurkovič, 2002) has shown that in their probable future careers our graduates will need a high level of English language competence and also that language learning strategy use among students at our faculty ranges from low to medium. Many students do not experience difficulties in coping with language course requirements only but also with discipline-specific course content, which is shown by the extremely high drop-out rate.

In these circumstances we should look for classroom interventions that might allow less successful learners to catch up with their peers (Čeh, 2007) and provide students that have previously acquired a high level of English language competence with opportunities to explore their learning processes and become (more) successful lifelong learners. A possible classroom intervention aiming at these objectives is the explicit introduction of learning strategies into the teaching that rests upon the premise that language learning in a higher education setting will become more efficient if supported with language learning strategies (Jurkovič, 2007).

*1.1 Theoretical framework*

Studies in language learning strategies started more than three decades ago when the idea of successful language learners was put forward by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). Since then a multitude of definitions of language learning strategies has been developed. In a revision of the theoretical framework in this field, Macaro (2006) suggests that learning strategies should be described in terms of their essential features, which are their origins in working memory, conscious mental activity that learners employ to pursue a goal in a given learning situation, and transferability.

A series of different taxonomies of language learning strategies has also been produced. Some refer to learning strategies across all language skills (see Oxford 1990; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) while others are limited to a single language skill or element, for example vocabulary (Schmitt, 1997). The decision which taxonomy to choose usually is subjective and dependent on a number of factors, for instance comparability of study results based on a measuring instrument (for example the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, Oxford, 1990) and its reliability and validity. Hence, the strategies that were explicitly introduced into the teaching process were selected from Oxford's (1990) division into direct (memory, cognitive, and compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, and social) strategies.

In turn, based on different taxonomies a variety of strategy instruction models have also been proposed (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Cohen, 1998; Grenfell & Harris, 1999). Despite differences that distinguish one instruction model

from another, they share a number of features (Harris, 2003; Chamot, 2004). As Chamot (2008) points out, all current strategy instruction models focus on the development of students' knowledge about their learning processes and encourage them to adopt strategies that will make their learning more efficient. According to Cohen et al. (1996), language learning strategy instruction has two components: regular class work and explicit training in learning strategies. In fact, research studies have shown that effective language learning strategy instruction should be explicit and integrated into regular class work activities (Chamot, 2004) although we should be aware that implicit instruction can also be powerful (Chamot, 2008).

The strategy instruction model used in the present research study was the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach or CALLA (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). The main reason for the selection of this model was that it includes three components, which are study-discipline content (inherent to the teaching and learning of languages for specific purposes, which is – in addition to general English – one of the learning objectives of the language course at our faculty), academic language skills (which means that it is appropriate for higher education settings) and explicit scaffolded instruction in language learning strategies (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

The CALLA model is based on the cognitive theory of learning, which distinguishes between three types of functions in memory: long-term memory, short-term memory, and working memory. In long-term memory declarative (in memory frameworks) and procedural (as production systems) knowledge is stored, in short-term memory we only keep information for a few moments while information is manipulated in working memory (Anderson, 1985). Procedural and declarative knowledge in long-term memory is modified and upgraded based on information that is processed and manipulated in working memory. As mentioned earlier, one of the essential features of learning strategies is their origins in working memory (Macaro, 2006). Learners mostly do not have control over processes in long-term memory with which, however, working memory interacts. Foreign language learning "is brought about, in long-term memory, via strategic behaviour in working memory, through the development of declarative and procedural knowledge." (Macaro, 2006, p. 332) Therefore, to understand learning strategies and language learning we need to understand what declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge in particular consist of and how they are stored and learned. In addition, the role of metacognitive knowledge in successfully learning and applying learning strategies is equally important.

Numerous studies have shown positive effects of language learning strategy instruction on language performance (Cohen et al., 1996; Lawson & Hogben, 1998; Kusiak, 2001; Rasekh & Ranjbary, 2003; Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Lau & Chan, 2007; Graham & Macaro, 2008). Nevertheless, several studies that have examined the effect of strategy training on language performance have shown inconclusive results or revealed that strategy training had no effect on language performance (O'Malley, 1987; Oxford et al., 1990; Rossiter, 2003). In addition, most of these studies have focused on the effect of training in the use of one strategy or one group of strategies on a single language skill or element (e.g., Kusiak (2001); Rossiter (2003); Lau & Chan (2007); Graham & Macaro (2008)). Moreover, several studies focused on strategy training in relation to vocabulary learning and retention (Lawson & Hogben, 1998; Rasekh & Ranjbary, 2003; Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007). Most importantly for this study, none of these studies reports results of strategy instruction in mixed language ability groups. In studies where the language competence level of participants is stated, it is described loosely (e.g., intermediate, lower intermediate, poor), which does not provide accurate data. Nevertheless, we can assume that language learning strategy instruction was conducted in relatively homogeneous language groups in terms of initial language ability.

Therefore, this article addresses the following question: "Does explicit language learning strategy instruction across all strategy groups contribute to better language-test and self-assessment scores in English as a foreign language in a higher education setting in mixed language ability groups?"

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Setting

The Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport is a member of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. English is the only language taught at the faculty. The English course covered ninety hours organized in thirty three-hour weekly sessions in the first year of studies and ninety hours in the second year (unfortunately, after the full implementation of the higher education reform the number of hours will be reduced to a total of 120). The learning objectives of the language course in the first year of studies, which the present study is related to, included the development of general English in addition to language specific to the fields of traffic technology and transport logistics.

### 2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of seventy-seven full-time first year students, aged between 18 and 24, attending classes of English as a foreign language for students of traffic technology and transport logistics from October, 2007, through May, 2008. The average age of the participants at the beginning of the language course was 19.94. Twenty-nine participants were female and forty-eight participants were male.

Twenty-two participants in the study were enrolled in the four-year programme of transport logistics, twenty-one participants in the four-year programme of traffic technology, and thirty-four participants in the three-year programme of traffic technology. While the number of students in both four-year study programme groups represented one hundred percent of the enrolled population, thirty-four participants in the three-year programme represented approximately one third of the enrolled population.

One of the four-year groups (transport logistics) was randomly assigned to make part of the treatment group together with the three-year traffic technology group. Therefore, the treatment group (group A) consisted of the three-year traffic technology group and the four-year transport logistics group (a total of fifty-six students). The contrast group (group B) consisted of the four-year traffic technology group (a total of twenty-one students).

It needs to be emphasized that even though the participants were enrolled in different programmes of study, for the purpose of this study the content and process of the English course were the same for all. No other courses at our faculty use English as the medium of instruction, which means that students were not exposed to any additional English input in the formal instructional setting and the fact that students attended different study programmes can be considered as having no effect on the results of this study.

A background questionnaire was used to determine differences and similarities between the treatment and contrast groups in relation to the following variables: age of participants, type of secondary school they had completed, secondary school cumulative grade point average, and secondary school English language grade. T-tests indicated no significant differences on any of these characteristics between groups.

One teacher of English as a foreign language participated in this study. She is a native speaker of the Slovene language. She has fifteen years of teaching experience at secondary school and higher education levels as well as with general and discipline-specific English language courses for adults. She has a PhD in language teaching methodology awarded by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

*2.3 Procedure*

*Routes to Traffic English* (Jurkovič & Harsch, 2004) was the coursebook used in both groups. This coursebook represents core study material for first-year students of traffic technology and transport logistics at our faculty. It includes tasks aiming at the development of all general language skills as well as discipline-specific vocabulary and skills. The language level of most tasks in the coursebook is set at level B1/B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). Additional handouts with authentic texts focusing on contemporary developments in the fields of traffic technology and transport logistics were also used.

In addition to usual language training the treatment group received explicit training in language learning strategies following the CALLA model whereas in the contrast group language learning strategies were implicitly embedded in instructions to language tasks but not explicitly discussed (see Figure 1). The explicit instruction of language learning strategies continued throughout the instructional period from October, 2007, to May, 2008. Language activities in the treatment group were interrupted twice to three times per session for approximately five to ten minutes to discuss the relevant strategies or clusters that were incorporated into the regular teaching process. The total time dedicated to scaffolded explicit strategy instruction can be estimated at approximately fifteen to twenty minutes per session (a total of approximately five hours or six percent of total course time). Therefore, the key difference between the teaching process in the contrast and treatment groups was that the treatment group was systematically and explicitly introduced to language learning strategies.

The training model focused on cognitive strategies (aiming to enhance language comprehension and production), metacognitive strategies (aiming to inform students on strategies that they can use to coordinate, regulate and evaluate their learning process), and memory strategies (aiming to facilitate vocabulary retention and recall). Using instructions for students to highlight differences in instruction in the treatment and contrast groups, the selected sample flow of explicit instruction in language learning strategies presents a strategy cluster consisting of metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and one social strategy (see Figure 1) that was introduced in week 11 of the language course.

Insert Figure 1 here

*2.4 Measures*

Data for the present study were collected by means of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT; Allan, 2004) and the CEFR global self-assessment rating scale (Council of Europe 2001).

The OPT is usually used as a placement test. However, it can also be used as a diagnostic test to determine the differences in language ability between the beginning and end of a language course. The test is divided into two main sections. The first one mostly aims at testing reading, listening and vocabulary size while the second section is a test of grammar, vocabulary and reading skills. A significant advantage of the OPT is that it has been calibrated against a series of international language examinations and levels, including CEFR levels. In the present study the OPT was used

at the beginning and end of the language course to collect data on the language ability of students and determine progress.

The self-assessment global rating scale was used for the self-assessment of language competence at the beginning and end of the language course. It summarizes the set of proposed common reference levels in six single holistic paragraphs where each paragraph refers to one reference level (ranging from A1 – breakthrough level to C2 – mastery). In the present study the Slovene version of the global rating scale was used to collect data on the self-assessed language level of students and determine progress. Among other purposes, the use of the CEFR includes the raising of the awareness of students of their language knowledge (Council of Europe, 2001). In addition, using a common set of proficiency levels enables comparability of data across studies.

The results are based on data collected through the use of these two instruments. Therefore, it was essential to calculate the psychometric properties concerning their reliability and validity under the conditions described in 2.1 Setting and 2.2 Participants. The reliability of the results of both tests was confirmed using Pearson's coefficient of correlation (test-retest reliability), principal components analysis (internal consistency reliability), and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (criterion-related validity). The predictive validity of the results of both tests was confirmed using regression analysis (the proportion of explained variance of achievement test scores as determined by the results of both instruments).

*2.5 Procedure*

2.5.1 Design and variables

This study aimed at exploring the *a priori* hypothesis that explicit introduction of language learning strategies into the teaching process would contribute to better language-test and self-assessment scores in mixed language ability groups. To explore whether this variable (strategy instruction) had an effect on these scores, regression analysis was used to find out if students from the treatment group had made more language progress than students from the contrast group.

In addition, in order to compare differences among students from both groups at similar levels of pre-existing language ability, sub-groups were formed: students at CEFR levels A1 and A2 were merged into a single group (A1/A2), students at B1 (representing the majority of all students) were retained as a single group, and students at levels B2 and C1 were merged into a B2/C1 group.

The statistical procedure of regression analysis was the major analysis used for the examination of the relationship between membership in group A (treatment group) and OPT and self-assessment scores. A sample required for testing regression coefficients should include at least twenty times as many cases as independent variables, or to have n >= 50 + 8*m (m refers to the number of independent variables) for testing R-square (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). Despite being modest in size, the sample of seventy-seven participants meets both requirements. However, after all students had been divided into subgroups by their pre-existing language ability ("A1/A2", "B1", and "B2/C1"), the number of cases in each group significantly decreased and did not meet the requirements for testing regression or determination coefficients. As a result, in the second step of each analysis independent samples t test was used instead.

The two dependent variables that were included in two separate regression models (and independent samples t test in the second step of the analysis) are:

- scale variable "test difference", which reflects the difference in OPT scores at the beginning and end of the language course, assumed to indicate tested language progress, *or*

- scale variable "self-assessment difference", which reflects the difference in self-assessed levels of language competence at the beginning and end of the language course, assumed to indicate perceived language progress.

The independent variables that were included in the regression models are:

- dichotomized variable "membership in group A". Value 1 indicates that a student was a member of the treatment group (A), *and*

- scale variable "initial score – test", which reflects OPT scores at the beginning of the language course, assumed to have had an effect on language progress and acting as the moderating variable, *or*

- interval variable "initial score – self-assessment", which reflects self-assessed levels of language competence at the beginning of the language course, assumed to have had an effect on language progress and acting as the moderating variable.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0 for Windows) was employed to process the data obtained in the study. The alpha level used in this study was 0.05.

## 3. Results

The OPT was given as a test to all students at the beginning (October, 2007) and end of the language course (May, 2008) to explore whether explicit instruction in learning strategies had an effect on the improvement of language ability as

tested by the OPT. Mean scores, confidence intervals, standard deviation values, and differences between OPT scores at the beginning and end of the language course in both groups are presented in Table 1.

Insert able 1 here

At the end of the language course mean OPT scores were higher. However, standard deviation values indicate that dispersion of values in the treatment group was greater than in the contrast group. To explore these results further, distribution of students into classes was necessary. Given that OPT results are calibrated against CEFR levels, students from both groups were divided into classes that correspond to CEFR levels from A1 to C1 (nobody reached C2) (see Figure 2 for the treatment group and Figure 3 for the contrast group).

Insert Figure 2 here

Figure 2 shows that at the beginning and end of the language course most students' English competence as measured by the OPT in the treatment group was at level B1. The data also reveals that the share of students at levels A1 and A2 considerably decreased at the end of the language course. The share of students at level B1 remained almost the same (it can be assumed that some students from levels A1 and A2 progressed to level B1) while the share of students at levels B2 and C1 increased. In addition, Figure 2 indicates heterogeneous levels of language ability among students in the treatment group, ranging from A1 to C1 at the beginning as well as end of the language course.

Insert Figure 3 here

Similar observations can be made in relation to the contrast group, as can be seen from Figure 3. At the beginning and end of the language course most students were at level B1. Language competence in this group was less heterogeneous than that in the treatment group given that no student was at level A1.

In order to find out whether explicit training in learning strategies as the key feature distinguishing the treatment group from the contrast group enhanced language learning and contributed to these results or, in other words, that students from the treatment group improved their OPT scores more than students from the contrast group, linear regression analysis (ENTER method) was used to identify independent predictors of language progress expressed by the variable "test difference". Two predictors were included in the analysis: membership in group A and initial language competence as measured by the OPT as the moderating variable (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 here

The results of regression analysis presented in Table 2 show that membership in the treatment group did not have any statistically significant effect on language progress as measured by the OPT; in other words, students from the treatment group did not improve their scores more than their peers from the contrast group.

On the other hand, initial language competence as measured by the OPT had a statistically significant negative effect on language progress as measured by the OPT. In fact, eighteen per cent of the difference in OPT scores could be predicted through initial language competence. What is surprising is the negative effect of initial language competence on language progress.

The self-assessment global rating scale was given to all students at the beginning (October, 2007) and end of the language course (May, 2008) to explore the self-assessed level of language competence and whether explicit introduction of learning strategies into the teaching and learning process had an effect on self-assessed or perceived improvement of language competence. Mean scores, confidence intervals, standard deviation values, and differences between self-assessment scores at the beginning and end of the language course in both groups are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 here

Data presented in Table 3 show that the average values indicating self-assessed language competence increased in both groups (by 0.30 in the treatment group and 0.20 in the contrast group). Standard deviation values indicate that dispersion of values indicating self-assessed language competence in both groups was almost equal. Nevertheless, in order to provide a comparison with OPT scores, Figures 4 and 5 show the distribution of students on reference levels by self-assessed language competence at the beginning and end of the language course.

Insert Figure 4 here

Figure 4 shows that at the beginning and end of the language course most students in the treatment group self-assessed their language competence to be at level B1. The data also reveals that the share of students at levels A1 and A2 decreased and that the share of students at levels B1 and higher increased. These results indicate that in the treatment group language competence as self-assessed by the students increased but also confirm the heterogeneous nature of the treatment group in terms of language ability both at the beginning and end of the language course.

Insert Figure 5 here

In the contrast group a slightly different pattern was observed, as shown in Figure 5. The share of students at level A1 increased by nine percent while the share of students at level A2 decreased by the same value. On the other hand, the share of students at B1 considerably decreased while the share of students at B2 and C1 increased. It seems that in the contrast group the perceived language competence among low-level students decreased while increasing among high-level students.

Figures 4 and 5 show that except some low-level students from the contrast group self-assessed language competence increased. In order to find out whether explicit introduction of learning strategies as the key feature distinguishing the treatment group from the contrast group enhanced language learning as perceived by students, linear regression analysis (ENTER method) was used to identify independent predictors of language progress expressed by the variable "self-assessment difference". Two predictors were included in the analysis: membership in group A and initial language competence as measured by the global self-assessment scale as the moderating variable (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 here

The results of linear regression analysis presented in Table 4 reveal that membership in the treatment group did not have a statistically significant effect on self-assessed language progress. In other words, language progress as perceived by students was not enhanced through the explicit instruction in language learning strategies.

On the other hand, initial language competence as measured by the self-assessment global rating scale had a statistically significant negative effect on language progress. Again, as the regression analysis using OPT scores has shown, higher initial language competence seems to have had a negative effect on language progress.

In summary, language-test and self-assessment scores have shown that explicit instruction in learning strategies as the key feature distinguishing the treatment and contrast groups did not have any statistically significant effect on the tested or self-assessed language progress. In order to explore these results further, students from both groups at similar levels of initial language competence were compared by means of the independent samples t test. Sub-groups were formed based on the number of cases at each CEFR level: students at levels A1 and A2 were merged into a single group (A1/A2), students at B1 (representing the majority of all students) were retained as a single group, and students at levels B2 and C1 were merged into a B2/C1 group. The results have not revealed any statistically significant differences between the treatment and contrast groups if students were divided into sub-groups based on their initial language competence as measured by both instruments (see Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the Appendix).

## 4. Discussion

The main aim of the present research study was to explore the hypothesis that explicit language learning strategy instruction across all learning strategy groups enhances the development of (self-perceived) language ability in mixed language ability groups. Regression analysis was the main analysis used to test the hypothesis and determine the effect of membership in the treatment group, where language learning strategies had been explicitly integrated into the teaching and learning process, on test scores and self-assessed levels of language competence.

Firstly, the results have shown that the treatment and contrast groups were highly heterogeneous in terms of language competence. Due to the low number of enrolled students in each study programme, though, division of students into groups by language competence is not feasible. Another interesting aspect is that although most students had learned English for eight years in elementary and secondary schools, many among them had only reached CEFR levels A1 or A2. A secondary aim of the intervention was to empower high-level students for lifelong learning by providing them with opportunities to enrich their strategy repertoires. However, the results have shown that neither high-level nor low-level students have benefited from this approach.

Most importantly for this study, the results have shown that explicit language learning strategy instruction did not yield a statistically significant effect on language progress. In fact, language ability in both groups increased but the increase in the treatment group was not significantly higher than that in the contrast group.

Although these results bring into question the explicit introduction of language learning strategies into language classrooms where time for strategy training is deducted from the time dedicated to the teaching of language and in particular when groups are highly heterogeneous in terms of language ability, several possible reasons that might have led to these results can be identified.

The first one is the amount of time dedicated to explicit language learning strategy instruction. Total language course time was limited to ninety hours and time dedicated to language learning strategy instruction, as mentioned above, was deducted from this time. In my opinion, even if research studies have shown that to be effective language learning strategy instruction has to be integrated into regular (language) course work and be explicit (Chamot, 2004), the organization of a separate module is an alterative solution when course time constraints may hinder the effectiveness of training. The second alternative is to implement implicit instruction in learning strategies, which does not take away time from language teaching yet may still have powerful effects (Chamot, 2008). In fact, instead of claiming that

explicit language learning strategy instruction in the treatment group did not have any effect on language learning we may advance the hypothesis that language learning was enhanced to the same or similar extent by *implicit* language learning strategy instruction in the contrast group. In order to be able to confirm this hypothesis, however, three groups would be necessary: group A (with explicit learning strategy instruction), group B (with implicit learning strategy instruction), and group C (with no strategy instruction). To my knowledge, no study has explored this question yet.

In my opinion, the primary reason for the scarce efficiency of training was the heterogeneous nature of both groups (in particular the treatment group) in terms of initial language competence. Learners at different levels of language competence use different strategies. Learners at higher levels of language competence, for instance, use more complex strategies than learners at lower levels of language competence (Griffiths, 2003) and link them into efficient strategy chains or clusters matched to the language task. As a result, the training needs of students at different levels of language competence seem to be different.

A factor that is related to the heterogeneous nature of groups is the level of teaching. Most tasks in the coursebook are set at level B1/B2. As suggested by Chamot and O'Malley (1994), Oxford (1994) and Chamot et al. (1999), the tasks that language learning strategy instruction is related to should be at an appropriate level of difficulty (which can be matched against Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis). In a group that is heterogeneous in terms of language competence, however, tasks that are set at levels B1/B2 might be too difficult for A1 or A2 students that have to invest all cognitive energy into the (un)successful completion of the language task and not learning strategy use while the same task might be relatively easy for B2 or C1 students that perceive learning strategies as useless because they are able to complete the task without their application.

As mentioned in the Introduction, within the language learning research community several studies have indicated positive effects of language learning strategy instruction on language performance (e.g., Cohen et al., 1996; Lawson & Hogben, 1998; Sengupta, 2000; Kusiak, 2001; Rasekh & Ranjbary, 2003; Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Lau & Chan, 2007; Graham & Macaro, 2008). Given that the results of the present study have shown that training in learning strategies across all strategy groups has not yielded the desired results, it would seem reasonable, in particular under time constraints, to focus on a limited number of strategies and link them to a single language skill, which depends on the learning objectives. As Oxford and Ehrman (1995) found out, cognitive strategies are the strongest predictor of language progress, which suggests that (in addition to metacognitive strategies as discussed earlier) in a higher education setting cognitive strategies should be the strategy group to focus on rather memory strategies that bear a low cognitive potential.

A further finding that is worth exploring is that both regression models revealed that initial language competence was a negative predictor of language progress (even though the share of explained variance was rather low). Obviously, the teaching approach, course materials, and level of language input did not provide high-level students with opportunities to improve their general English competence. These results indicate the need for a higher level of individualization of teaching through the use of papers, portfolio assignments and additional tasks that would provide high-level students with more challenges for language acquisition and progress in the formal education setting in mixed language-ability classes.

In conclusion, the investigation was conducted among three groups of first-year students that were taught by the same teacher, which produced the rather modest sample of seventy-seven participants. The ability to generalize the data is therefore limited. These results, however, do bring into question the justification for explicit introduction of language learning strategies in a higher education setting where groups are highly heterogeneous in terms of language competence. Finally, an aspect that has not been researched by the international community yet is the effect of implicit (rather than explicit) instruction in learning strategies, which does not take away time from the real content of language teaching which remains to be – language.

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**Appendix**

Insert Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, Table 8 here

Table 1. Test scores in the treatment and contrast groups at the beginning and end of the language course

|  | **Treatment group** | | | **Contrast group** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mean | Confidence interval | | Std. dev. | Mean | Confidence interval | | Std. dev. |
| **October 2007** | 125.63 | 121.67 | 129.58 | 14.75 | 126.62 | 121.22 | 132.02 | 11.86 |
| **May 2008** | 131.50 | 127.56 | 135.44 | 14.72 | 131.48 | 126.89 | 136.07 | 10.08 |
| **Difference** | 5.87 | 2.79 | 8.96 | 11.51 | 4.86 | 1.22 | 8.49 | 7.98 |

Table 2. Beta weights of membership in the treatment group and OPT scores at the beginning of the language course as predictors of language progress as measured by the OPT based on the total regression model (N=77), proportion of explained variance ($R^2$) by this model and significance level of F-value

|  | **Membership in group A** | **Initial score – test** | $R^2$ | **F** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| "test difference" | 0.03 | -0.42[**] | 0.18 | 7.89[**] |

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Table 3. Self-assessed CEFR levels in the treatment and contrast groups at the beginning and end of the language course

|  | **Treatment group** | | | **Contrast group** | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mean[a] | Confidence interval | | Std. dev. | Mean[a] | Confidence interval | | Std. dev. |
| **October 2007** | 2.66 | 2.38 | 2.94 | 1.03 | 3.14 | 2.75 | 3.35 | 0.85 |
| **May 2008** | 2.96 | 2.68 | 3.25 | 1.06 | 3.33 | 2.79 | 3.88 | 1.20 |
| **Difference** | 0.30 | 0.09 | 0.52 | 0.81 | 0.20 | -0,23 | 0.61 | 0.92 |

[a] 1- A1; 2 – A2; 3 – B1; 4 – B2, 5 – C1, 6 – C2.

Table 4. Beta weights of membership in the treatment group and self-assessment scores at the beginning of the language course as predictors of language progress as measured by the self-assessment global scale based on the total regression model (N=77), proportion of explained variance ($R^2$) by this model and significance level of F-value

|  | **Membership in group A** | **Initial score – self-assessment** | $R^2$ | **F** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| "self-assessment difference" | -0.00 | -0.29 | 0.09 | 3.44[**] |

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the variable "test difference" in groups A1/A2, B1, and B2/C1 according to OPT scores

| Level | Group | N | Mean | Std. dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1/A2 | Treatment (A) | 18 | 8.67 | 1.82 |
| | Contrast (B) | 7 | 7.29 | 2.71 |
| B1 | Treatment (A) | 24 | 8.41 | 1.98 |
| | Contrast (B) | 10 | 6.70 | 2.49 |
| B2/C1 | Treatment (A) | 14 | -0.21 | 15.01 |
| | Contrast (B) | 4 | -4.00 | 2.45 |

Table 6. Independent samples t test for the variable "test difference" in groups A1/A2, B1, and B2/C1 according to OPT scores

| | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | 95% confidence interval of the difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1/A2 | Equal variances assumed | 0.41 | 0.69 | 1.38 | -5.60 | 8.36 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | 0.42 | 0.68 | 1.38 | -5.75 | 8.51 |
| B1 | Equal variances assumed | 0.49 | 0.63 | 1.72 | -5.37 | 8.80 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | 0.54 | 0.60 | 1.72 | -4.91 | 8.34 |
| B2/C1 | Equal variances assumed | 0.25 | 0.81 | 1.93 | -14.38 | 18.24 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | 0.46 | 0.65 | 1.93 | -7.01 | 10.87 |

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for the variable "self-assessment difference" in groups A1/A2, B1, and B2/C1 according to self-assessment scores

| Level | Group | N | Mean | Std. dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1/A2 | Treatment (A) | 24 | 0.67 | 0.17 |
| | Contrast (B) | 4 | 0.50 | 0.29 |
| B1 | Treatment (A) | 21 | 0.00 | 0.77 |
| | Contrast (B) | 9 | 0.11 | 1.27 |
| B2/C1 | Treatment (A) | 11 | 0.09 | 0.16 |
| | Contrast (B) | 8 | 0.13 | 0.23 |

Table 8. Independent samples t test for the variable "self-assessment difference" in groups A1/A2, B1, and B2/C1 according to self-assessment scores

| | | t | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean difference | 95% confidence interval of the difference | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1/A2 | Equal variances assumed | 0.39 | 0.70 | 0.17 | -0.71 | 1.05 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | 0.50 | 0.64 | 0.17 | -0.68 | 1.01 |
| B1 | Equal variances assumed | -0.30 | 0.77 | -0.11 | -0.88 | 0.66 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.24 | 0.81 | -0.11 | -1.12 | 0.90 |
| B2/C1 | Equal variances assumed | -0.13 | 0.90 | -0.03 | -0.61 | 0.54 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | -0.12 | 0.90 | -0.03 | -0.63 | 0.57 |

**Treatment group**

We will listen to a relatively long text (twelve minutes) discussing benefits and drawbacks of high-speed trains for consumers and society. At the end you will be asked to orally summarize the text to a partner.

- Do you ever use the strategy of summarizing in language learning?
- Summarizing is important because it allows you to recombine information in new ways, which enhances retention.
- Before summarizing, it is always a good idea to identify the main points and supporting details.

Listen to the text on high-speed trains and follow these instructions:

- Before listening: use the strategy of *linking new to known information* and write down anything you already know about high-speed trains. We will briefly discuss your ideas before we start the listening task.

- Listen to the text for the first time. Use the strategy of *identifying the main points* (benefits and drawbacks) and write them down in the chart on p. 31.

- Use the strategy of *cooperating with peers* and compare the main points you have identified with a partner.

- Listen to the text for the second time. Use the strategy of *identifying details* and accompany each main point with a detail that you find relevant or interesting.

- Use the strategy of *cooperating with peers* and compare these details with a partner's.

- Work with a partner and use the strategy of *summarizing* to orally summarize the content of your chart.

You followed a process that included:
- linking new to known information,
- finding out main points,
- finding out details,
- taking notes,
- cooperating with a partner, and
- summarizing.

Reflect on the following questions (using the strategy of *evaluation*):
- Do you think it was more efficient to deal with the text in this way instead of simply 'listening' and 'concentrating', which you had mentioned at the beginning? Why?
- Do you think that the same strategy cluster could be applied to a reading task? Which changes would you have to make?
- Do you think you could use the same strategy cluster in a real-life situation (e.g., while watching a documentary at home)? Which changes would you have to make?

**Contrast group**

We will listen to a relatively long text (twelve minutes) discussing benefits and drawbacks of high-speed trains for consumers and society. At the end you will be asked to orally summarize the text to a partner.

Listen to the text on high-speed trains and follow these instructions:

- Before listening: write down anything you already know about high-speed trains. We will briefly discuss your ideas before we start the listening task.

- Listen to the text for the first time. Identify the main points (benefits and drawbacks) and write them down in the chart on p. 31.

- Compare the main points you have identified with a partner.

- Listen to the text for the second time. Identify details and accompany each main point with a detail that you find relevant or interesting.

- Compare these details with a partner's.

- Work with a partner. Orally summarize the content of your chart.

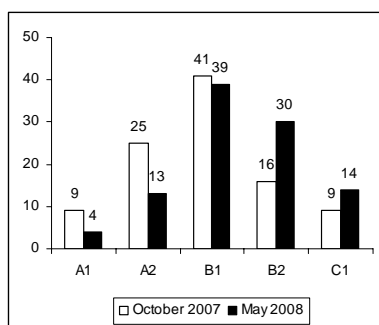Figure 1. Sample flow of instruction in the treatment and contrast groups

Figure 2. CEFR levels based on OPT scores in the treatment group
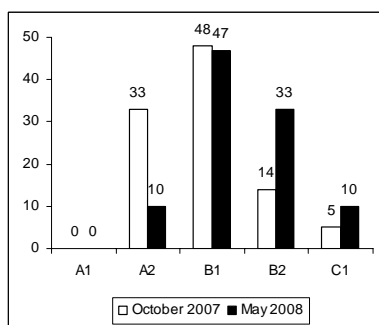


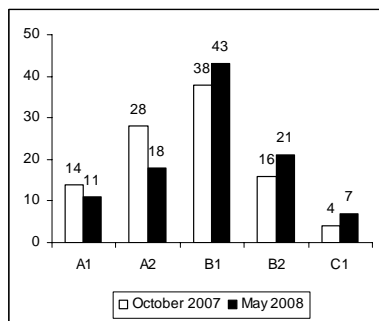Figure 3. CEFR levels based on OPT scores in the contrast group



Figure 4. Self-assessed CEFR levels in the treatment group
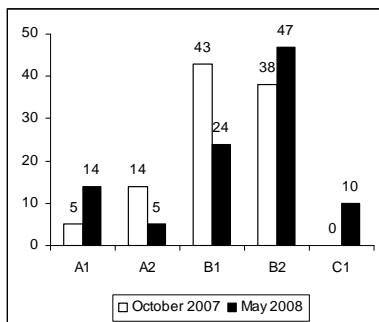


Figure 5. Self-assessed CEFR levels in the contrast group

# Interactive Cultural Cultivating in FLT

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**Abstract**

Culture cultivating in foreign language teaching (FLT) is usually conducted through factual introductions in the form of articles, books, seminars, lectures or workshops. This approach regards L2 learners as passive receivers of cultural knowledge without their interaction involved. This paper aims at raising an interactive approach to develop L2 learner's cultural awareness through contrastive analysis on data collected in an FLT classroom on the basis of observation and introspection.

**Keywords:** Cultural cultivating, Observation, Introspection, Contrastive analysis, FLT

## 1. Introduction:

In the 1950s and 60s, an anthropological and sociological view of language in connection with culture and society began, to a limited extent, to influence language teaching theory. Language teaching theorists began to recognize that anthropology and sociology might offer a theoretical frame-work for teaching about culture and society. They repeatedly stated that an important purpose of language learning was to learn about a country and its people. Lado, Brooks, Rivers and Chastain have all firmly stated that cultural understanding and cross-cultural comparisons are a necessary aspect of language pedagogy. In 1960 an American committee on language and culture expressed the relationships which it regarded as essential in three statements: (Bishop 1960:29)

(1)Language is a part of culture, and must be approached with the same attitudes that govern our approach to culture as a whole.

(2)Language conveys culture, so that the language teacher is also of necessity a teacher of a culture.

(3)Language is itself subject to culturally conditioned attitudes and beliefs, which cannot be ignored in language.

It is apparent that culture, as an ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. The acquisition of a second language, except for specialized, instrumental acquisition, is also the acquisition of a second culture. Therefore, the incorporation of culture into foreign language teaching was brought into prominence. How to develop cultural awareness on L2 learners' side has become a necessary and important ingredient and a major concern in L2 teaching and learning. Typically, a foreign culture is mainly introduced in forms of articles, books, lectures, seminars and workshops by illustrating the great varieties of customs, habits, beliefs and values. This kind of fact-based culture learning emphasizes the memorization of facts. It regards culture as something static. Language learning in this way turns out to be a knowledge transmission and passive reception learning process without L2 learners' interaction. Furthermore, realization and understanding of cultural knowledge does not necessarily result in the formation of intercultural communicative competence. Most of the time it just leads to a stereotypical comprehension of a foreign culture.

## 2. Data Collection and Interactive Cultural Awareness

Culture, as an integrated part of language, should also be taught and learned in an interactive way with learner's cognition involved. In an FLT classroom, culture learning can be incorporated into L2 learning process as a way of forming intercultural communication competence. This approach first demands authentic data collection on basis of observation and introspection.

*Observation* is a primary method of data collection used by anthropologists, and ultimately of great value to L2 learners as well. This approach is usually developed in three stages. First, it requires L2 learners reporting observable behaviors without imposing value judgements or drawing conclusions. Whenever there are native speakers involving in a particular conservation or event, learners attention should first be directed on '*who', 'when', 'where', 'what', 'why'* and '*how'* are involved in it. For example, in films, videos, writings, or even daily authentic social interactions, participants'

verbal and nonverbal behaviors and social context will offer L2 learners insightful clues into the culture they are observing and learning. Normally, they are expected to keep a close eye on the following key elements in an social interaction:

a) *Who is being observed? (e.g.: age, sex, role, and group membership, if more than one are involved) What is the relation between different members?*

b) *Where is it taking place? (e.g.: office, street, park. home, club, classroom, etc)*

c) *What is being done/not done? (by whom, to whom, in what manner, for what purpose, in what relation to other events) And what has been done or happened?*

d) *How does the event develop? (setting, beginning, developing, climax and ending)*

e) *How do participants react to different situations? etc.*

In FLT observation can be conducted either in classroom or out of classroom with learners involved or uninvolved. The key to successful observation and inference is freeing oneself as much as possible from the restraints of one's own cultural experience. This requires cultural relativism, sensitivity and objectivity in perceiving others' culture.

Then, after L2 learners have made a factual observation, they can be directed to the second stage --- getting answers to questions. By getting answers to questions about customs, habits, beliefs and values from those behaviors observed, L2 learners are encouraged to make inferences about the many indiscernible aspects of culture. Questions to be posed could be:

a) *How do people greet each other?*

b) *Who talks to whom in what manner on what topic?*

c) *Who orders whom to do what/punishes whom for what?*

d) *How is difference/agreement shown?*

e) *How is insult/praise/satisfaction/dissatisfaction/thank/apology expressed?*

f) *Why does whoever agree/refuse/reluctant to do what?*

g) *How does dress differ for age, sex, social class and social activity?*

h) *What behaviors are strange to you? Why? If it were you, what would you do then?*

i) *What is the hierarchy of authority in the family?*

The last stage of observation involves the formation of L2 cultural stereotypes based upon numerous observations and answers to questions about culture L2 learners had before. They may form better outline ideas by considering the following:

a) *Relations between members in office, family, campus*

b) *Birth, death and burials ceremonies*

c) *Marriage tradition and educational organization*

d) *Social manners and domestic manners*

e) *Food and cookery*

f) *welfare and Medical systems*

g) *Religions, beliefs and values of life*

h) *Government and its functions*

i) *Historical, geographical features of target language country*

Of course, due to the complexity of a culture, it is rather difficult for L2 learners to form an all-in-one stereotype of the culture in question. Furthermore, inferences drawn from observation might do not agree with each other. This demands L2 learners to single out individual differences. However, this in no sense indicates that an answer to a particular question by a given individual is wrong. What L2 learners need to bear in mind all the time is the fact that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answers--just differences. Securing information about another culture requires some degree of objectivity and openness. Anyone who does not accept the reality and validity of cultural differences as a general concept is not ready to get insight into another culture.

In FLT, observation is not simply applied for the single purpose of developing cultural awareness. It is often integrated with activities designed to develop L2 learners' communicative competence. While students are getting answers to the above questions, they are not just trying to learn the target language, but also trying to understand the target culture. In this way, the learning of a foreign culture is incorporated into foreign language teaching.

*Introspection* is a means for data collection only about one's own culture. This is important not only for data collection, but also for establishing the fact that everyone has a culture. In getting to know an L2 culture (acculturation), learners are also deemed to have a clear idea what their native culture (enculturation) is. Introspection into one's native culture is just to activate an L2 learners' subconsciously embedded cultural ideas so as to develop awareness of the differences between his native and second cultures.

The first step in introspection in L2 teaching is to ask individual learners to formulate very specific answers from their own experience to various questions about culture which are imposed in the second stage in the observation process. A second stage is applying contrastive analysis to a comparison of responses to questions about culture so as to search for systematic and consistent differences between different cultures. A distinction and contrast of the two cultures in question is not only of great assistance to understanding a second culture, but also an important stage in viewing culture objectively.

## 3. Contrastive Analysis of Cultural Difference and Interactive Cultural Cultivation

Robert Lado suggests a model for contrasting aspects of culture which is quite relevant to educational purposes--'to discover and describe the problems that the speakers of one of the languages will have in learning the other.' (Lado: 1957:vii) He suggests that aspects of culture (as language) which are entirely different are less likely to cause interference and cultural misunderstanding than those which are similar on the surface but differ significantly in other ways. By contrastive analysis, L2 learners can detect three types of cultural differences which might predictably cause problems and difficulty in L2 learning and application process.

a. *same form, different meaning*---those very similar, or even the same, behaviors may have very different meanings in different cultures. Hissing, for example, means disapproval in the U.S., but asks for group silence in Spanish-speaking countries.

b. *same meaning, different form*---depending on different cultures, different behaviors are assigned with the same meaning. For example: shaking hands/head for Chinese and shrug for native English speakers are both forms of disagreement, ignorance or baffle.

c. *same form, same meaning, different distribution*---the same behaviors expressing the same meaning, may have culturally different contexts in which they are appropriate or inappropriate. For example, '*arm in arm*' is usually a sign of close relation between members. It is appropriate between spouses, lovers or between young men and women in English countries. But in China, it is only found between man and woman as lovers, or between the same sexes as intimates, or between children and parents to show care, help, or respect to the elders from the young. (Be Jiwan, 1999:11).

The purpose of finding out these cultural differences is aiming at avoiding errors resulting from cultural differences. For example, by comparing the different language forms in greeting to each other adopted in Chinese and English separately, L2 English Chinese learners are not supposed to say "*Have you eaten your dinner*?" to a native speaker of English.

In comparing responses to questions about a foreign culture, three entities are involved: the teacher, the students and teaching resources (books, videos, pictures or recordings). Activities organized involving the above three will lead to three types of interaction, namely, teacher-student interaction, student-resources interaction, and student-student interaction. In the first interaction, communicative activities take place through the teacher's preliminary task assignments and a prompt and positive comment on students' answers to questions about culture. In the second interaction, communicative activities take place when students receive verbal and nonverbal messages from teaching resources (either checked or unchecked by the teacher). In the third interaction, communicative activities take place when students discuss any questions about a foreign culture or differences between the two cultures, or share information about culture with each other from their experience. Through these three kinds of interactions, students' interests and motivation are aroused. They hence become active in language learning.

## 4. Conclusion

It is self-evident that culture cultivating depends on effective interaction. Adequate input of foreign cultural knowledge in the FLT classroom seems to be of great assistance to developing cultural awareness on learner's side. In our daily L2 teaching, cultural knowledge can not only be introduced through academic approaches, such as lectures or articles, it also can be integrated with the process of developing L2 learner's communicative competence. By having learners getting answers to or organizing discussions about culture in question, and a contrastive analysis of different responses to them in different social contexts, both culture cultivating and language teaching are incorporated into a process of developing learner's communicative competence by way of developing L2 learner's cultural awareness. This is the essence of language teaching and learning from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

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# The Relationship between Teacher and Peer Support

# and English-Language Learners' Anxiety

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**Abstract**

This study sought to shed light on the relationship between support (from teachers and peers) and foreign-language learners' anxiety. A total of 158 adult Taiwanese English-language learners completed three questionnaires: a background questionnaire, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, and the Classroom Life Measure. The results showed that teacher academic support was the most pervasive variable correlated with language-learning anxiety, compared to other types of support (i.e., teacher personal support, student academic support, and student personal support). Language learners felt less anxious when they perceived that they obtained more academic support from their teachers.

**Keywords:** Foreign language learning, Language learning anxiety, Teacher support, Peer support

## 1. Introduction

Language learners develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting—a second identity—while learning a second language (Brown, 2001). When language learners are unable to adequately convey their messages, they may feel uncomfortable using the second language and thus develop language-learning anxiety. Horwitz (2000) states that experiencing foreign language anxiety is natural to second-language learners. Learners feel uncomfortable or anxious while using a second language during the initial period when they must by definition present a less precise version of themselves (Horwitz, 2000). Because of this, language teachers should not merely recognize the presence of foreign language anxiety in language learners but also help learners acknowledge, cope with, and reduce their anxiety. In addition, peers play an important role in second-language learning because language learners spend considerable time with their peers and share similar language difficulties. Thus, this paper is intended to shed light onto the effect of these factors, (i.e., teacher support and peer support) on language learning anxiety. Does teacher and/or peer support have a significant relationship with language-learning anxiety?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Language Learning Anxiety

Language-learning anxiety is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.128). Krashen (1985) points out that anxiety has an impact on learners' affective filter, the mental block that impedes

learners' full use of comprehensible input. If the affective filter is high, language learning is prevented, whereas if the filter is low, learning is facilitated. For example, as a result of pressure or anxiety, a student may not be able to answer an English grammar question posed by the English teacher. However, the student may be able to recall the answer for the same question when the teacher asks the whole class, instead of calling on a specific student to answer. Therefore, language-learning anxiety may negatively contribute to language learning.

The correlation between anxiety and performance has been widely investigated. Studies show that language-learning anxiety adversely affects learners' language performance (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Aida, 1994; Gregersen, 2003; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Saito & Smimy, 1996; Young, 1991). Aida's (1994) study found that the anxiety experienced by Japanese language learners had a negative correlation with their performance. Gregersen (2005) mentions that language-learning anxiety serves as a good predictor of foreign-language achievement. Gregersen (2003) explored the reactions of anxious and nonanxious foreign-language learners to their own errors. Participants were videotaped twice: once while being interviewed by the researcher in English and once while watching themselves in the taped interview. Gregersen (2003) found that anxious learners made more errors and recognized fewer errors in a recall situation than nonanxious learners. Gregersen (2003) also found that anxious language learners tend to participate less in language-learning activities in an effort to protect their social image by reducing the possibility of making linguistic errors in front of peers and teachers. Because of their lack of participation, anxious language learners are less likely to develop their linguistic abilities.

In a study investigating whether anxiety affected oral interview performance, Young (1991) found that anxiety had a significant negative correlation with the Oral Proficiency Interview, which was designed to assess oral performance in a foreign language by using a face-to-face structured conversation. The result suggests that the greater anxiety learners experience, the lower their level of oral proficiency. Abu-Rabia (2004) found that a negative correlation exists between language-learning anxiety and spelling performance; namely, the higher the levels of anxiety on the part of learners, the lower their spelling performance. In a review of foreign language anxiety, Horwitz (2001) concludes that language anxiety causes poor language learning in some individuals; therefore, identifying sources of language anxiety is essential.

*2.2 Role of Teachers and Peers*

Social support from teachers and peers is an important component that may influence student academic achievement. When students perceive that they are emotionally supported by their teacher, they tend to engage more actively and make a greater effort in their academic work (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1994). They are more likely to apply extended self-regulated learning strategies (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Hallinan (2008) found that students liked school better if they felt supported with respect and praise from their teachers. The more the students liked school, the better their academic and social outcomes. It is nearly impossible to entirely eliminate anxiety, but as Horwitz (2008) suggests, teachers can help students feel more comfortable. Teachers' support and understanding are particularly important. The results from Abu-Rabia's (2004) study showed that the attitudes of seventh-grade EFL learners concerning teacher support were negatively correlated with language-learning anxiety. Horwitz (2008) recommends that language teachers reduce the anxiety level of language learners by helping learners recognize their own discomfort and establish reasonable, as well as achievable, expectations of language learning. Meanwhile, teachers should correct students' mistakes gently, using humor and games to create a relaxed and low-anxiety environment, and engage students in small groups and in pair activities to make them more comfortable.

In addition, peer support should be considered essential to language learners because students spend considerable time together learning the language and encounter similar language-learning challenges. Learners may receive support from their classmates not only in the form of friendship but also in ways that facilitate learning. Peer support has greater reciprocity because peers share equal status (Cauce et al., 1982; Hartup, 1989; Wentzel, 1994). In contrast, teacher support comes from an authoritative relationship. Nevertheless, both forms of support are important (Cauce et al., 1982; Wentzel, 1994).

**3. Methodology**

*3.1 Participants*

A total of 158 Taiwanese college students (108 males and 50 females) participated in this study. All participants shared the same cultural and linguistic background; Chinese was their native language. These students ranged in age from 18 to 21. Participants were from four intact classes and all had enrolled at the university as freshmen. Every participant took an English class from the same teacher during the experiment. The average amount of time they spent learning English was 8.1 years with a standard deviation of 2.18. They came from diverse majors: business administration, chemistry, and industrial/electrical/civil engineering.

*3.2 Instrument*

The instruments used in this study consisted of three questionnaires: the background questionnaire, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and the Classroom Life Measure. The background questionnaire was

developed to obtain participants' demographic information (name, gender, age, grade level, major, and years of English learning).

Language-learning anxiety is an established concept in second-language learning and can be assessed by questionnaires. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS), which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), has been extensively used to measure the extent of students' anxiety levels during language classes. The FLCAS contains 33 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with an option of neutral. The FLCAS was designed to investigate students' language anxiety concerning communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1991). Communication apprehension is described as learners' shyness resulting from anxiety while using a foreign language to communicate (Horwitz et al, 1991). Language learners' fear of failure or poor performance leads to test anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is referred to as apprehension, avoidance, and expectation of a detrimental evaluation by others (Horwitz et al. 1991). Sample questions from the FLCAS include: "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class;" "Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it;" and "When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.129-130). The FLCAS has been rigorously validated for internal reliability, test-retest reliability, and construct validity (Horwitz, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986).

The Classroom Life Measure was designed by Johnson and Johnson (1983) to assess students' perceptions of 16 aspects of classroom climate, such as cooperative learning, resource interdependence, competitive learning, teacher academic support, teacher personal support, peer academic support, peer personal support, fairness of grading, and so forth. This questionnaire contains a total of 91 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to disagree with a choice of neutral.

Of the 91 questionnaire items in the Classroom Life Measure, 17 pertaining to teacher and peer support were used in this study: teacher academic support (4 items), teacher personal support (4 items), peer academic support (5 items), and peer personal support (4 items). Questionnaire items concerning teacher academic support were designed to elicit students' perceptions regarding the extent to which their teachers cared about how much they learned and wanted to help them learn, whereas questions regarding teacher personal support explored students' perceptions of their teachers' attitudes towards them as individuals. On the other hand, items on peer academic support focused on students' perceptions of the extent to which their counterparts cared about how much they learned and wanted to help them learn. Questions on peer personal support were designed to explore students' perceptions of how much their classmates cared about and liked them as individuals. Sample questions included: "My teacher wants me to do my best schoolwork;" "My teacher likes me as much as he/she likes other students;" and "Other students in this class want me to come to class every day." The discussion of how the validity and reliability of the new set of questionnaire items were established is presented in the Results section of the current study.

Minor modifications were made to the instrument. For example, "foreign language" was changed to "English language." The term "class" in the original Classroom Life Measure was replaced with "English language class." All questionnaire items were translated by one of the authors, fluently bilingual in Chinese and English, into the participants' native language of Chinese. To ensure the practical equivalence and clarity of translation, the translated questionnaires were checked by another bilingual speaker of Chinese and English.

*3.3 Procedures*

Participants were required to complete three questionnaires on background information, the FLCAS, and the Classroom Life Measure during their regular English class meeting. These students spent approximately 15 to 20 minutes answering the questions.

## 4. Results

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the FLCAS and the Classroom Life Measure was calculated to determine the reliability of these two questionnaires. In addition, two factor analyses were conducted to ensure the underlying construct validity of these instruments. Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were run to explore the relationship between support from teacher and students and the level of language-learning anxiety. To further investigate the role of gender, two more Pearson product-moment correlation analyses were conducted.

With regard to reliability, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the FLCAS was .82 and .89 for the Classroom Life Measure. These coefficients suggested that FLCAS and the Classroom Life Measure were reliable measures. Descriptive analysis for participants' responses to the FLCAS is presented in Table 1. The data was rounded to the nearest tenth. Because of the rounding, the percentages may not total 100.

*4.1 Construct Validity of the FLCAS*

An exploratory factor analysis with Promax rotation was conducted to ensure the underlying constructs of the FLCAS items. Four factors were extracted from the data (see Table 2); item 27 was not loaded on any factor. A total of 12 items

(1, 3, 4, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, and 33) were loaded on Factor 1 and explained 26.8% of the total variance. Factor 1 was labeled as speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Factor 2 included 9 items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32) and was labeled as comfort with English learning. It accounted for 10% of the total variance. Six items (7, 9, 10, 23, 24, and 25) were loaded on Factor 3 and accounted for 6% of the total variance. Factor 3 was labeled as fear of failing the class. Five items (6, 16, 17, 21, and 26) comprised Factor 4 and explained 4.8% of the total variance. Factor 4 was termed as negative attitude toward learning English. Collectively, these four factors explained 47.7 % of the total variance.

*4.2 Construct validity of the Classroom Life Measure*

Another exploratory factor analysis was conducted to ensure the underlying constructs of the 17 items of the Classroom Life Measure. Table 3 presents analysis concerning factor loadings, communality, and percents of variance for the factor analysis of the Classroom Life Measure. A total of four factors were extracted from the data: 4 items (items 1 through 4) loaded on Factor 1; 4 items (items 5 through 8) on Factor 2; 5 items (items 9 through 13) comprised Factor 3; and 4 items (items 14 through17) were included in Factor 4. Factor 1, labeled as teacher academic support accounted for 37.0% of the total variance. Factor 2, termed as teacher personal support explained 18.1% of the total variance. About 8.0% of the total variance was accounted by Factor 3, which was labeled peer academic support. Factor 4, explaining 5.4% of the total variance, was termed peer personal support. These four factors cumulatively accounted for 68.5% of the total variance.

*4.3 The relationship between teacher and peer support and language learning anxiety*

A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between teacher and peer support and language learning anxiety. Results showed statistically significant relationships between teacher academic support and speech anxiety as well as fear of negative evaluation ($r=-.23$, $p<0.001$), between teacher academic support and student comfort with English learning ($r=.19$, $p<0.05$), and between teacher academic support and students' fear of failing the class ($r=-.28$, $p<0.01$). Results indicated that teacher personal support significantly correlated with student comfort with English learning ($r=.27$, $p<0.01$); and students' fear of failing the class ($r=-.18$, $p<0.05$).

A significant relationship was found between peer academic support and student comfort with English learning ($r=.23$, $p<0.01$). In addition, statistically significant differences were found between peer personal support and student comfort with English learning ($r=.19$, $p<0.05$).

## 5. Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between language-learning anxiety and various types of support (i.e., academic support and personal support from teachers and peers). The results of this study revealed that language-learning anxiety and support were correlated. Teacher academic support was negatively correlated with speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as well as fear of failing the class, but was positively associated with student comfort with English-language learning. The results suggested that if language learners felt academically supported by their teachers, they were less likely to fear negative evaluations and class failure. Academic support helps these learners become more comfortable in their English learning. Moreover, results indicated that teacher personal support correlated with two types of anxiety, student comfort with English-language learning and fear of failing the class, and was positively correlated with student comfort with English-language learning and negatively associated with students' fear of failing the class. These results were in accordance with those found by Goodenow (1993) and Wentzel (1994). If learners perceive that they are emotionally supported by their teachers, they tend to put more effort into their learning. As a result, they are less likely to worry about the negative evaluations or class failure.

Furthermore, both academic and personal support from peers was positively correlated with students' comfort with English-language learning. The results from the current study revealed that any support from either English teachers or peers was positively related with student comfort with English learning. These results were consistent with Cauce et al. (1982) and Wetzel's (1994) claim that both support from teachers and peers are important in students' learning. Both teachers and peers can help language learners feel at ease in a language class. In addition, these results further support Kraseh's (1985) claim that if language learners were anxious, their language learning might be impeded. If language learners perceived that they received more support from their teachers and peers, they were more comfortable. Thus, their English learning would be facilitated.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between teacher and peer support and language-learning anxiety. Results showed that teacher academic support was the most pervasive variable in relation to language-learning anxiety. It showed significant relationships with different types of language-learning anxiety. Teacher academic support was negatively correlated with speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as well as fear of failing the class, and positively correlated with student comfort with English-language learning. The more academic support language learners received from teachers, the less they experienced speech anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of failing the class. In

other words, the more these EFL learners perceived their teachers as being supportive and encouraging, the lower anxiety levels they experienced. Results also indicated that teacher personal support significantly correlated with student comfort with English-language learning and negatively correlated with students' fear of failing the class. In addition, peer academic and personal support and student comfort with English-language learning were positively correlated, as were peer personal support and student comfort with English learning. Results showed that all types of support correlated with language-learning anxiety and were facilitative in lowering such anxiety. However, among the different types of support, teacher support seemed to be the most pervasive in relation to language-learning anxiety.

## 7. Implications for Teaching

The results of this study have several implications for language teaching. We identified the significant relationship between different types of teacher and peer support and language-learning anxiety. Results suggested that a warm and accepting relationship between the teacher and students is important in facilitating language learning. Language teachers should sustain a good relationship with students in order to lower their anxiety and facilitate their language learning. Tallon (2009) suggests that language teachers need to acknowledge the existence of foreign language anxiety and realize that language class can be intimidating for some students. Therefore, language teachers should help make the learning environment less stressful. As Abu-Rabia (2004) suggests, because of the important role of teacher personality and attitude on student learning, teachers should be formally trained in ways to show support for their students. In addition, teachers should help language learners acknowledge, discuss, and cope with anxiety.

## 8. Recommendations for Future Research

Our results can contribute to the literature on the relationships between support from teachers and peers and language-learning anxiety and on the relationship between different sources of support and language-learning anxiety. More research is warranted to explore the relationship of language-learning anxiety with regard to different learner characteristics: age, gender, years spent learning English, student expectations, and cultural background. Furthermore, future studies using qualitative measures, such as classroom observation and/or interviews, to investigate the relationship between support and language learning anxiety will shed more light on this issue.

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Table 1. FLCAS items with percentages of students selecting each alternative (N=158)

| SD | D | N | A | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class. | | | | |
| 1.3 | 19.6 | 35.4 | 34.8 | 8.9 |
| 2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class. | | | | |
| 5.1 | 33.5 | 30.4 | 24.1 | 7.0 |
| 3. I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class. | | | | |
| 3.2 | 13.3 | 27.2 | 37.3 | 19.0 |
| 4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English. | | | | |
| 2.5 | 25.3 | 25.3 | 38.6 | 8.2 |
| 5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes. | | | | |
| 5.1 | 14.6 | 31.6 | 39.2 | 9.5 |
| 6. During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course. | | | | |
| 1.9 | 12.7 | 45.6 | 31.0 | 8.9 |
| 7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am. | | | | |
| 0 | 3.2 | 28.5 | 49.4 | 19 |
| 8. I am usually at ease during tests in my English class. | | | | |
| 8.9 | 28.5 | 34.8 | 24.1 | 3.8 |
| 9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class. | | | | |
| 1.3 | 11.4 | 26.6 | 40.5 | 20.3 |
| 10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class. | | | | |
| 5.7 | 10.1 | 15.8 | 34.2 | 34.2 |
| 11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes. | | | | |
| 3.8 | 15.8 | 49.4 | 24.7 | 6.3 |
| 12. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. | | | | |
| 1.3 | 20.3 | 43.0 | 30.4 | 5.1 |
| 13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class. | | | | |
| 3.2 | 12.7 | 31.0 | 42.4 | 10.8 |
| 14. I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers. | | | | |
| 19.6 | 32.9 | 34.2 | 10.1 | 3.2 |
| 15. I get upset when I don't understand what the English teacher is correcting. | | | | |
| 2.5 | 22.2 | 43.0 | 25.3 | 7.0 |

16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.

| 5.7 | 34.2 | 37.3 | 17.1 | 5.1 |

17. I often feel like not going to my English class.

| 17.7 | 41.1 | 27.8 | 10.1 | 3.2 |

18. I feel confident when I speak in English class.

| 8.9 | 34.2 | 38.6 | 15.8 | 2.5 |

19. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

| 7.0 | 33.5 | 36.1 | 20.3 | 3.2 |

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.

| 3.2 | 13.9 | 24.1 | 46.2 | 12.7 |

21. The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get.

| 5.7 | 24.7 | 27.2 | 32.9 | 9.5 |

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.

| 4.4 | 25.9 | 42.4 | 23.4 | 3.8 |

23. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.

| 0.6 | 4.4 | 27.8 | 48.1 | 19.0 |

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.

| 0.6 | 5.1 | 30.4 | 51.9 | 12.0 |

25. English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

| 1.3 | 21.5 | 36.7 | 27.8 | 12.7 |

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.

| 8.9 | 31.6 | 34.2 | 21.5 | 3.8 |

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.

| 1.9 | 30.4 | 29.1 | 29.1 | 9.5 |

28. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

| 2.5 | 17.1 | 42.4 | 29.1 | 8.9 |

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.

| 1.9 | 15.2 | 36.1 | 38.6 | 8.2 |

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.

| 3.2 | 15.2 | 29.1 | 34.8 | 17.7 |

31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.

| 5.1 | 18.4 | 32.9 | 32.9 | 10.8 |

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.

| 15.8 | 35.4 | 39.2 | 7.0 | 2.5 |

33. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

| 1.9 | 10.1 | 25.9 | 49.4 | 12.7 |

Note: SD= Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly agree

Table 2. Factor loadings, communality, percents of variance for principal component analysis with Promax rotation for FLCAS items

| Label | A | B | C | D | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 | Communality |
| Item 1 | .36 | | | | .35 |
| Item 3 | .78 | | | | .55 |
| Item 4 | .72 | | | | .53 |
| Item 12 | .48 | | | | .41 |
| Item 13 | .73 | | | | .44 |
| Item 15 | .70 | | | | .37 |
| Item 19 | .46 | | | | .27 |
| Item 20 | .81 | | | | .66 |
| Item 29 | .53 | | | | .43 |
| Item 30 | .47 | | | | .41 |
| Item 31 | .47 | | | | .48 |
| Item 33 | .54 | | | | .48 |
| Item 2 | | .57 | | | .45 |
| Item 5 | | .63 | | | .46 |
| Item 8 | | .76 | | | .62 |
| Item 11 | | .44 | | | .63 |
| Item 14 | | .63 | | | .51 |
| Item 18 | | .71 | | | .55 |
| Item 22 | | .60 | | | .37 |
| Item 28 | | .71 | | | .55 |
| Item 32 | | .71 | | | .64 |
| Item 7 | | | .82 | | .62 |
| Item 9 | | | .56 | | .44 |
| Item 10 | | | .49 | | .44 |
| Item 23 | | | .63 | | .53 |
| Item 24 | | | .44 | | .39 |
| Item 25 | | | .45 | | .47 |
| Item 6 | | | | .34 | .18 |
| Item 16 | | | | .62 | .64 |
| Item 17 | | | | .75 | .55 |
| Item 21 | | | | .33 | .41 |
| Item 26 | | | | .58 | .65 |
| % of Variance | 26.8 | 10.0 | 6.0 | 4.8 | |
| % of total variance | | | | | 47.7 |

Note: Label A= Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation; Label B= Comfort with English learning; C= Fear of failing the class; D= Negative attitude toward learning English

Table 3. Factor loadings, communality, percents of variance for principal component analysis with Promax rotation for the Classroom Life Measure

| Label | Teacher Academic Support | Teacher Personal Support | Peer Academic Support | Peer Personal Support | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 | Communality |
| Item 1 | .85 | | | | .70 |
| Item2 | .77 | | | | .51 |
| Item3 | .73 | | | | .74 |
| Item4 | .92 | | | | .74 |
| Item5 | | .50 | | | .69 |
| Item6 | | .82 | | | .63 |
| Item 7 | | .71 | | | .60 |
| Item8 | | .68 | | | .70 |
| Item9 | | | .60 | | .59 |
| Item10 | | | .81 | | .65 |
| Item11 | | | .93 | | .81 |
| Item12 | | | .74 | | .70 |
| Item13 | | | .46 | | .66 |
| Item14 | | | | .71 | .67 |
| Item15 | | | | .93 | .80 |
| Item16 | | | | .85 | .76 |
| Item17 | | | | .84 | .72 |
| % of Variance | 37.0 | 18.1 | 7.9 | 5.4 | |
| % of total variance | | | | | 68.5 |

# Dictogloss as an Interactive Method of Teaching Listening Comprehension to L2 Learners

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**Abstract**

The article describes how the dictogloss method and cooperative learning can be combined to promote the development of listening and speaking skills of second language learners. The paper begins with an outline of the dictogloss procedure and the theoretical background behind it. The procedures for conducting a dictogloss-based listening class are then described in great detail. Finally, the potential advantages of this method as well as concerns about its implementation are discussed.

**Keywords:** Dictogloss, Listening and Speaking Instruction, Cooperative Learning, Learner Autonomy

## 1. Background

Listening is one of the most important language skills. Feyten (1991) claims that more than 45% of communicating time is spent listening, which clearly shows how important this skill is in overall language ability. Traditionally, listening skills have been taught in isolation or they were sometimes combined with speaking tasks. However, the nature of real-life interaction and the limited time most learners have at their disposal are strong arguments in favour of the integration of the four skills and for different modes of language practice.   This paper will describe the methodology for teaching a listening class based on the dictogloss approach, which offers a bridge between different language skills and promotes collaborative learning in the classroom

Dictogloss is a classroom dictation activity where learners listen to a passage, note down key words and then work together to create a reconstructed version of the text. It was originally introduced by Ruth Wajnryb (1990) as an alternative method of teaching grammar.   The original dictogloss procedure consists of four basic steps:

a. *Warm-up* when the learners find out about the topic and do some preparatory vocabulary work.

b. *Dictation* when the learners listen to the text read at a normal speed by the teacher and take fragmentary notes. The learners will typically hear the text twice. The first time the teacher reads the text, the students just listen but do not write. The second time, the students take notes.

c. *Reconstruction* when the learners work together in small groups to reconstruct a version of the text from their shared resources.

d. *Analysis and correction* when students analyse and compare their text with the reconstructions of other students and the original text and make the necessary corrections (Wajnryb, 1990).

Wajnrub argues that this method gives students a more precise understanding of English grammar than do other approaches and consequently leads to higher accuracy in language use. Compared to other more traditional approaches to teaching grammar the value of dictogloss is in its interactive approach to language learning. Text reconstruction promotes both the negotiation of meaning and the negotiation of form. It is a co-operative endeavour which forces learners to stay actively engaged in the learning process.   "Through active learner involvement students come to confront their own strengths and weaknesses in English language use. In so doing, they find out what they do not know, then they find out what they need to know." (Wajnryb, 1990:10)

Wajnrub also argues that this integration of testing and teaching stimulates the learners' motivation. Rather than having the teacher select specific grammatical features and have the students practice them, the students identify their grammar problems and the teacher teaches in response to their needs.

Dictogloss has been the subject of a number of studies and commentaries, which have, in most part supported the use of the technique (Swain & Miccoli, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 1998; Nabei, 1996; Lim & Jacobs, 2001). The supporters of the method pointed out that dictogloss are a multiple skills and systems activity. Learners practice

listening, writing and speaking and rely on their knowledge of semantic, syntactic and discourse systems of the target language to complete the task. However, the focus of these studies remains on grammatical competence. Improvements in listening comprehension or students' note-taking skills are seen as by-products of the method rather than its objectives.

This paper will take a different approach. Rather than looking at listening improvements as beneficial side-effects of the grammar-focused instruction, the article will describe a listening class centered around the dictogloss procedure. The benefits of the approach and some concerns regarding its implementation will be discussed. It is hoped that the description of the procedure and the insights from the literature on cooperative learning will help teachers use the dictogloss method more effectively.

## 2. Placing the dictogloss procedure in a listening context

Listening requires the utilisation of both systemic and schematic knowledge (Widdowson, 1983; Buck, 2001). In order to interpret the discourse, the listener must have a sufficient knowledge of the language system (i.e. an understanding of the phonological, syntactic and semantic aspect knowledge) as well as general knowledge of the world.

At the initial stages of language learning the primary goal of listening instruction is to help learners understand the acoustic input. Listening activities are designed to give the learner practice in identifying correctly different sounds, sound-combinations and intonation patterns. As the learners' proficiency increases, meaning based activities become more important.

Meaning based activities can be divided into two broad categories: (1) activities that assess *direct meaning comprehension* and those that measure *inferred meaning comprehension* (Mewald, Gassner & Sigott, 2007). *Direct meaning comprehension* means the understanding of surface information and facts that are explicitly stated in the input text. Some examples are listening for gist, listening for main points and listening for specific information.

*Inferred meaning comprehension* includes implicit understanding and drawing inferences from input texts. The information required is not clearly stated, and the listener must go beyond the surface information to see other meanings which are not explicitly stated in the text. Some examples of this type of listening are inferring a speaker's intention or attitude towards a topic, relating utterances to their social and situational contexts, recognising the communicative function of utterances, and so on.

The dictogloss listening procedure falls into the first category. This is important as the type of listening activity has direct implications for the selection of the listening materials.

## 3. Material selection

Although most real-life listening is spontaneous and colloquial in character (Ur, 1998), there are situations when we have to listen to uninterrupted speech for a longer a period of time. Some examples are listening to academic lectures or stories.  The dictogloss method is generally more suitable for this kind of material than dialogues or instructions. Transactional texts (i.e. texts where the primary purpose is to communicate information) are easier to reconstruct than interactional passages where the purpose is to maintain social relationships.

The passages should not be too long, so that students can finish reconstruction and receive feedback in the same lesson. In my experience, about 2 minutes of this kind of listening is plenty for intermediate-level classes.

Another decision that teachers need to make is whether to use authentic materials or prepared texts. Natural speech is linguistically different from writing. Acoustic input is characterized by features such as phonological modification, word stress and intonation, hesitation, loosely or poorly organized ideas and fragments of language with false starts, restatements, vocabulary repair and even grammatically incorrect sentences, and so on (Buck, 2001). Learners also need to be able to process word meanings, syntax and discourse features. Therefore, it is important that dictogloss texts are carefully selected.

Dictogloss works better with prepared listening passages. As Ur (1998) points out, the use of authentic unrehearsed discourse has two main drawbacks. First, the speed of such recordings is ungraded and the language may be difficult, making the recordings suitable only for the highest levels. Second, when listening to recordings of natural conversations it is very difficult to understand the situation, identify the different voices and cope with frequent overlaps. Teachers may want to take advantage of published recordings in listening comprehension textbooks or, if those are not available, prepare the text themselves and read it to their students. For reasons of consistency, however, it is preferable that students listen to a recording rather than a teacher-read text.

The speed and complexity of the input will have a significant effect on the learners' ability to process the text. As a general rule, the texts should be at or below the students' current proficiency level, although they may include some new vocabulary. Listening comprehension requires language processing to be almost automatic. As the speech rate gets faster, students have to pay more attention to lexical and grammatical processing and less attention to the interpretation of the meaning. They are likely to miss parts of the text and consequently fail to understand the message (Buck, 2001).

Another factor to consider is the explicitness of discourse markers. As Olsen and Huckin (1990) observe, ESL students can sometimes understand all the words in the text, and still fail to understand the main points. The understanding of academic lectures was found to depend less on the meaning of individual sentences, and more on their inter-relatedness and the structure of the whole text (Dunkel & Davis, 1994). Clear discourse markers can significantly improve the comprehension of L2 listeners (Chaudron & Richards, 1986).

Therefore, listening materials should be graded. For lower level students, or students who are not used to the dictogloss approach, shorter and slower texts with the micro- and macro-structure explicitly signaled should be selected. However, as the learners' listening skills improve and they learn to process language more automatically, teachers should expose them to more realistic texts (e.g. spontaneous speech), which preserve the characteristics of the oral language. As redundancy was found to benefit higher-ability students more than lower ability ones (Chiang & Dunkel, 1992), more proficient learners should be exposed to texts which include repetition and paraphrasing. (A sample text suitable for low intermediate learners is available in the Appendix.)

## 4. Dictogloss listening procedure

The basic steps in dictogloss listening classes are the same as those outlined by Wajnrub (1990) for the purpose of grammar teaching. There are four stages: *preparation, listening, reconstruction* and *analysis and correction*. Each stage will now be described in more detail. (Sample materials for each stage are available in the Appendix).

### *4.1 Preparation*

The purpose of the preparation stage is to make students more receptive to the listening passage. Listening is a dynamic process where the listeners construct meaning based on the interplay of background knowledge and the new concepts presented in the text. In other words, listening comprehension requires both topical and linguistic knowledge. Teachers can facilitate this process by providing background information and helping students with unfamiliar language. The purpose of the preparation stage is therefore twofold: it should give the learners a topical warm-up as well as familiarize them with vocabulary that will appear in the text.

4.1.1 Topical warm-up

The topical warm-up is important as it enables learners to activate their background knowledge. Knowledge of the content helps listeners interpret the message correctly. This is because understanding presupposes an interaction between the knowledge stored in the semantic memory and perceptual experience (Kintsch, 1977). As learners often have insufficient knowledge of the linguistic system, content and textual schemata may be crucial for an understanding of the text.

Topical preparation is particularly important when the texts may introduce culturally unfamiliar concepts. Background knowledge is represented in human memory through scripts, that is, sets of expectations people have about general concepts, places, situations, actions and their sequences. Scripts play an important role in human information processing and they tend to be culture-bound (Buck, 2001). Therefore, the extent to which the listener may share background knowledge with the speakers is an important issue to consider at the preparation stage.

One simple way to introduce the topic is to give students some topical questions for discussion. For example, if listening is going to be about food, asking students to discuss questions such as *What kind of food do you like? How healthy are your eating habits? Do you prefer to eat out or at home? What is the most unusual food you have tried?* and so on can be a good warm-up activity. Questions should gradually draw the students' attention to the specific topic of the listening extract. For example, for the Model Lesson included in the Appendix, where the topic is Moroccan food, some good pre-listening questions are *Do you like ethnic food? What do you know about eating and drinking habits in Muslim countries? Where does couscous come from?* Teachers may also bring some visual aids (e.g. photos, pictures, graphs, objects) relevant to the topic and have students predict what the listening may be about, which may be about to help them develop their top-down processing skills.

4.1.2 Vocabulary preparation

Insufficient vocabulary knowledge is a frequent cause of listening comprehension problems. Due to limited vocabulary size and problems with the perception of acoustic forms, learners often experience difficulties in processing audio input. Learners may not know the words that appear in the spoken discourse, or they may not be able to recognize them in the strings of connected speech. Failure to understand the input correctly also means that learners will have difficulties anticipating the upcoming discourse. Studies from L1 showed that native speakers use context to make predictions about the utterances that are likely to follow (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Ur,1998). If the listener knows how the sentence is likely to finish, the closing words become redundant and he/she can focus on the next significant piece of information. As language learners often do not have enough linguistic knowledge, they cannot take advantage of contextual redundancy in the way that native speakers can. More mental effort is needed to process information which means that less information can be stored at one time in the short-term memory. As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992)

point out, such a reduction in storage capacity means that less linguistic data can be analyzed simultaneously, thus impeding the comprehension process.

Sufficient vocabulary preparation is also important because lexical knowledge entails background knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980). The more a learner knows about a word, the more he/she is likely to be aware of the semantic links in the structure of a text and consequently the more likely he/she is to activate the relevant background knowledge crucial for text comprehension. Recognition of word-forms triggers preexisting world knowledge as well as knowledge of any associated words or concepts related to that word. For example, when the word "tuxedo," is encountered in a text, the cognitive processes that are attempting to make sense of the text do not just access it as "a formal suit of clothing." All related concepts in the memory are activated. People remember that tuxedos are expensive, that they are worn infrequently, they are uncomfortable, they can be rented, they are often worn at weddings and so on (Willingham, 2006:2~3). Limited vocabulary may prevent students from activating the relevant content schemata, which in turn may have a negative effect on their listening performance.

Vocabulary activities at the preparations stage, therefore, have three main objectives: (a) to familiarize the learners with the meaning and the form of new words, (b) to help learners recognize lexical items in the strings of connected speech, (c) to promote productive usage of the target words necessary for the reconstruction stage.

Considering the limited time that can be devoted to explicit vocabulary instruction, it is important to select activities that will promote the aspects of the word knowledge outlined above, while not taking time away from the main objective of the lesson – listening comprehension. Collocation-based lexical instruction seems to be an effective way of achieving this goal. One activity that was found to be effective is a *Collocation Crossword*. The students are given a list of the target words with example sentences and definitions. After that, they are asked to complete a crossword where the clues are collocates that go with the target words. For each target word, two sentences are given. To facilitate retention, typical collocates should be highlighted. Here is one example from the Model Lesson:

It is a custom that someone _____ **water over** a guest's hands.

I _____ **wine into** your glass by mistake. (*Target word: *to pour*)

This activity promotes four different aspects of word knowledge: written and spoken form, meaning, grammar and collocates. In order to fill in the gaps, the learners must recall the meaning of the target words. As some sentences require different inflectional forms, learners also have to think about grammatical properties of the words. Highlighted collocates give typical examples of the usage of the target words. In order to complete the crossword, the students have to pay attention to spelling. Finally, an in-class check of the students' answers gives the teacher an opportunity to correct possible pronunciation errors and draw students' attention to how the target words may sound in the stream of fast connected speech allowing learners to acquire pronunciation, stress and intonation patterns.

### 4.2 Listening procedure

When the dictogloss procedure is first introduced, learners may need to hear the recording several times. The first time, the students are not permitted to take notes or write anything. They only listen to get a general idea about the text. The second time they can take notes. As inexperienced learners tend to try to write down everything, teachers should emphasize that they should focus on key words only that will help them with the reconstruction of the text. (These are often the words that were introduced in the preparation stage). A third listening gives learners a chance to confirm the information and revise their notes if necessary. A short 5-minute break between the second and the third listening gives students a chance to discuss their notes and identify the points they need to focus on. As learners get used to the procedure and their listening comprehension improves, it may be sufficient to only play the recording twice.

### 4.3 Reconstruction

Reconstruction is the central part of the dictogloss listening lesson. Working in small groups (3-4 people), students discuss what they heard and attempt to produce a coherent text close in content and organization to the original version. Limiting the group size is important to allow for individual contributions to be incorporated into the group effort (Wajnryb, 1990). The groups reconstruct the text in writing. The purpose is not to replicate the original text, but to maintain its informational content. One person is "the recorder" and the text is produced from the pooled information of the group members. In order to enforce the target vocabulary and ensure that the main points are included, students are asked to use all the words from the preparation stage.

During reconstruction, the teacher's role is to monitor the activity. No language input should be provided during this stage. There are several things, however, that the teacher can do to make the reconstruction process easier for the students. For example, enlarged copies of the lecture script may be posted around the room. One member from each group can check the script and then go back to the recorder to report what information was missing. Another student may go to another group to ask for missing information or clarification. When gathering information, students should not write anything nor have the written reconstruction with them. All information should be exchanged orally.

During reconstruction, teacher should also observe the nature of group interaction to ensure that all students participate and that the more advanced students do not dominate the group. They should encourage silent students and adjust the timing if necessary.

*4.4. Analysis and correction*

The last stage of the dictogloss procedure is the analysis and correction of the learners' texts. In a dictogloss listening class, the main purpose of the analysis and correction stage is to identify the problems students had with text comprehension. Therefore, although the reconstruction task requires writing ability, spelling mistakes should be less of a concern. One well-recognised characteristic of language processing is that learners tend to remember the content of the message rather than the exact words used (Sachs, 1967). The reconstruction task asks students to use their language ability to put words in the meaningful units. In that process, higher-ability students are likely to replace the words from the original text with their own synonyms. These ideas should be marked as being correct. However, in order to facilitate the acquisition of new vocabulary, students should get points for using the words from the preparation stage.

Correction can be done as a class or as group work. One option is to select 1-2 recorders to read what they wrote for each section / paragraph and then compare it to the original text. Another option is to give the students the transcripts of the recording and have them swap their reconstructions with another group and then ask them to give feedback on accurate/inaccurate or missing information. Instead of a transcript, teachers may want to give students a Reconstruction Checklist. (See a sample in the Appendix.)   In the list, the students are asked to check whether all target words have been used and whether all ideas have been included in the reconstruction. For each idea students are given an option of *fully included*, *partially included* or *not included at all* carrying 1 point, 0.5 points and 0 points respectively. Students can be asked to check their reconstruction (self-assessment) or the reconstruction of another group (peer-assessment). Students could be assigned parts of the text to check, or one student could be appointed as a "Checker" for the whole passage. The advantage of using a Reconstruction Checklist is that students get immediate feedback on their performance. Feedback is essential for language learning. As Ur (1998) observes, unlike reading and writing assignments which can tolerate delayed feedback, for listening it is essential that learners get feedback on their performance while what they have heard is still echoing somewhere in their mind, and there is still a possibility of hearing it again.   Immediate feedback enables students to understand their mistakes and to learn from them.   They can clearly see which vocabulary items or ideas are missing and group work provides assistance to members who have difficulty comprehending the content. The fact that the dictogloss task has very specific outcomes makes it easier for students to evaluate their success. Having the students calculate their points and fill in the progress chart (See a sample in the Appendix) allows students to monitor their progress. As the students' performance usually gets better with practice, increased perceived achievement is likely to have a positive effect on student motivation. This is important because a lack of perceived linguistic improvement can significantly reduce students' motivation.

The teacher's job is to make sure that peer feedback is correct and to provide additional linguistic guidance if necessary. By circulating among the groups, the teacher can observe and interact with a greater number of students and assist them with the problems they may encounter with the language or the content. In addition to linguistic feedback, the teacher could also discuss with the students how interaction among group members could be modified to make it more effective.

**5. Follow-up activities**

The dictogloss procedure offers various opportunities for follow-up activities. As in the original Wajnryb procedure, the teacher can compare the various versions and discuss language choices. Error analysis can help to identify grammatical points that the learners have difficulty with, which can then be further practiced. Also, if students have already studied or been exposed to particular structures that appear in the text, the reconstruction task can be used for review and self-correction.

The recordings can also be used as a basis for further discussion or written assignments. Learners may be asked to infer information about the speaker, evaluate the strength of his/her arguments, give their opinions on the information in the passage or share their experiences on matters related to the topic. For example, the Sample Lesson in the Appendix lends itself well to a discussion of table manners around the world, which can be further expanded to good manners in general, business manners and possible cultural misunderstandings that may result from the differences.

Another way of encouraging students to share their opinions is to have them insert their ideas at various points in the text (Jacobs & Small, 1993). This type of exercise promotes a kind of dialogue between the learners and the original authors of the text.

**6. Advantages of the dictogloss method**

The dictogloss model offers several potential advantages over other models of teaching listening comprehension.

First, the dictogloss method is an effective way of combining individual and group activities. Students listen and take

notes individually and then work together to reconstruct the texts. The reconstruction task gives students focus and a clear objective, which is a pre-condition for effective groupwork. Students are actively involved in the learning process and there are multiple opportunities for peer learning and peer teaching. After the teacher provides a framework for understanding the passage by explaining the background information, cooperative groups can develop more appropriate comparisons or examples that will assist learners with their comprehension (Thornton, 1999).

Second, the dictogloss procedure facilitates the development of the learners' communicative competence. Students' speaking time is significantly longer than in a traditional teacher-centered classroom. At the same time, the pressure to reconstruct the text within the time limit also means that students are more likely to use time effectively. Furthermore, unlike in a typical discussion class where students are presented with a list of topics or discussion questions and communication activities often have a simple question-and-answer format, in a dictogloss class, students' interaction is much more natural. A collaborative reconstruction task gives learners the opportunities to practice and use all modes of language and to become engaged in authentic communication. There is more turn-taking and students are more likely to use confirmation and clarification strategies. The variety of interaction was found to be more productive in terms of language development than the actual linguistic forms used (Wills & Wills, 1996).   As Long and Robinson (1998) point out, people learn languages best not by treating them as an object of study, but by experiencing them as a medium of communication.

Third, the reconstruction stage helps students try out their hypotheses and subsequently to identify their strengths and weaknesses. A reconstruction task encourages students to consider the input more closely. Noticing is known to be one of the crucial elements of the language learning process (Ellis, 1995). The reconstruction and correction stages help the students to compare input to their own representation of the text and to identify the possible gaps.   It is through this process of cognitive comparison that new forms are incorporated, students' language competence improves and students' interlanguage is restructured.

The dictogloss procedure also promotes learners' autonomy. Students are expected to help each other recreate the text rather than depend on the teacher to provide the information. The analysis and correction stage enables the students to see where they have done well and where they need to improve. Students gain insights into their linguistic shortcomings and also develop strategies for solving the problems they have encountered.

Dictogloss also offers a unique blending of teaching listening comprehension and the assessment of students' listening ability. Traditional tests formats such as true or false items, multiple choice or open-ended questions are often not sensitive enough to capture the specific problems that learners may have at different levels of the meaning comprehension process.   They typically allow only a relatively small number of selected items to be tested (e.g. main ideas, lexical items, and so on) while the rest of the text remains uncovered. If we look at a test as a diagnostic tool, then more detailed information about learners' understanding at different stages of the comprehension process is necessary. For the dictogloss task, learners need phonemic identification, lexical recognition, syntactic analysis and semantic interpretation. The reconstruction task offers an insight into the students' performance at all stages of the speech perception process. With the checklist that follows both teachers and learners can verify whether or not learning is taking place, and can identify the parts of the text and specific words or structures that cause miscomprehension. Furthermore, the nature of the reconstruction task forces students to listen carefully to other students' input, providing additional opportunities for listening practice.

The reconstruction task also promotes the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Students need to recall the meaning and the written form of vocabulary items introduced at the preparation stage. In addition, by asking students to use new words to form complex sentences, teachers can direct the learners' attention to collocations and usage restriction in the target language.

Another advantage of the dictogloss approach is that reconstruction tasks can raise students' awareness of rhetorical patterns in the target language. Generic and rhetorical patterns are often culture specific (Kaplan, 1966). Reconstruction tasks facilitate students' ability to understand and manipulate the patterns of textual organization and make them more sensitive to discourse markers and other cohesive ties in the language they are trying to acquire.

Finally, working in small groups reduces learners' anxiety as they have to perform only in front of "a small audience." This approach may be particularly suitable for those cultures in which students tend to be reticent and are not used to voicing their ideas in front of the whole class. In Japan, for example, students are often shy and group conscious. They feel insecure about their English ability and rarely volunteer their answers. They seldom initiate conversation, generally avoid bringing up new topics and rarely seek clarification (Burrows, 1996). When asked a direct question by a teacher, an individual student will often turn to her peers and seek advice before producing a response. Students feel more relaxed and confident when they share ideas that represent a group rather than themselves only. Group interaction is also important for the feedback stage. Peer feedback can either draw students' attention to gaps in their language knowledge or provide confirming feedback which consolidates that knowledge (Storch, 1998), while eliminating the students' fear that they will be "punished" for the mistakes they have made. In short, the dictogloss approach helps

students put aside affective factors and therefore may be suited for collectivist countries such as Japan or Korea, where students' shyness is a common problem.

## 7. Implementing the dictogloss approach

While the dictogloss method offers many advantages, there are three important issues that teachers need to be careful about with regard to its implementation. The first one is related to the socio-cultural context of the learners. The second one concerns work-group composition and dynamics. The third concern is related to student assessment.

In order for the dictogloss approach to be implemented effectively, it is important that learners recognize the benefits of collaborative learning. No-curriculum can be learner-centered unless the learners' subjective needs and perceptions about the learning process are taken into account (Nunan, 1988). If students do not feel that the curriculum and methodology match their needs, they are likely to feel frustrated. Instruction that violates the learners' preferred learning style will be of little value to them in the long run and offers the potential for conflict between the learners and the teacher (Wajnryb, 1990). In some cultures (e.g. Japanese, Korean or Chinese) students are used to having teacher-centered classes and they do not always perceive peer interaction as useful for their learning. Expectations of autonomous learning and student independence are very different from the pedagogical traditions of these countries. In these cultures, students expect to follow the teacher at all stages of the learning process. When students who are used to teacher-centered teaching practices are asked to work independently, they are often concerned about their errors not being corrected and their language not improving because of the limited time they spend talking to the teacher. The implementation of collaborative learning will not automatically motivate students or instigate a feeling of the responsibility being on them to develop their communicative competences. A mismatch between students' expectations on the one hand, and curricular content and pedagogical approaches on the other, is likely to result in student dissatisfaction with the teaching method and can significantly reduce student motivation. Therefore, it is imperative that students' expectations and beliefs about learning are not ignored. Teachers must provide a clear rationale for the methodology based on different teaching traditions. In order to make cooperative learning work, it is important that teachers explain the concepts behind it, provide the rationale underlying the selection of the particular task and increase students' awareness of the benefits of independent learning. In the case of the dictogloss procedure, this means making learners recognize that they have mutual goals. The teacher should remind the learners that the focus of the reconstruction task is not grammatical accuracy, but recall of the content, something they can help each other with. It should also be pointed out that with a transcript and the checklist, learners can easily confirm the points they have missed. While this may not always eliminate the effects of cognitive and socio-cultural factors, their effect may be minimized. If the students understand the reasons behind the activity and the value of what they are doing, their motivation to participate is likely to increase.

Another issue of concern is work-group composition and group dynamics. Cooperative learning means that students work together to accomplish shared goals. They are given two responsibilities: to maximize their own learning and to maximize the learning of all other group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1999a). Research (e.g. Dishon & O'Leary, 1984; Johnson & Johnson 1989) shows that heterogeneously grouped teams bring more benefits than homogeneously formed teams. Due to differences in background and in ways of learning different people tend to attend to different information in the discourse (Gardner, 1999). This difference in perspectives means that members can learn from each other and learn to appreciate the value of diversity. As a result of this interaction they can subsequently perform better as individuals. When students have to explain material to others, they engage in higher-level processing of the material. Joint efforts to achieve mutual goals have also been found to promote higher self-esteem, productivity and critical thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 1999a).

However, not all students perceive cooperative learning as effective and useful. Simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not automatically result in cooperative efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Teachers should also not assume that students will know how to work effectively in groups. Positive interdependence is not likely to happen on its own; it must be built into the learning task. Some students may lack confidence in their English ability and consequently be reluctant to participate in group interactions; other students may try to dominate the group. Therefore, it is crucial that instructors pay sufficient attention to group dynamics and ensure that positive learning climate is maintained. Careful preparation and management are necessary.

One factor that may have a strong impact on group dynamics is students' ability. Research has shown (e.g. Zigmond & Baker, 2002) that peer-coaching is the most common strategy teachers adopt to help weaker students. Instructors, however, are not always aware that this may cause discomfort and resentment on the part of stronger students. Matthews (1992) in his study on the attitudes of gifted students towards cooperative learning found out these often had negative reactions to working in cooperative groups. The students felt frustrated because they thought that weaker students were not listening to them and they also resented having the time taken from their own learning. They were often concerned about the quality and the grades, and therefore inclined to do all the work themselves. However, the students' attitudes changed when they were placed in more homogeneous groups with their intellectual peers. They felt

more relaxed because they did not have to do all the work and they felt it was like "*a friendly competition*". In L2 contexts, implementing cooperative learning is even more difficult due to students' limited ability to express themselves in the target language. Storch (1998) claims that learners with different proficiency levels approach reconstruction tasks differently. In her study, the intermediate students tended to work on the task on a word-by-word basis while the more advanced students considered the entire sentence, and relationships between ideas in the text. In groups where the students were approximately of the same level of proficiency, all members of the group participated in the task, while in the mixed-level groups more proficient learners tended to monopolize the conversational interactions.

These findings suggest that heterogeneous and homogeneous group work should be allowed. Completely free choice groups, however, should be discouraged to prevent students from always choosing the same partners. Creating gender diverse groups is also important, as gender diversity was also found to improve group performance (Maznevski, 1994). When opting for heterogeneous groups, teachers should spend some time on team building activities, because as Slavin (1995) notes, the combination of students that result from teacher-selected groups is likely to be the one that would almost never have been created without the teacher's intervention. Teachers should facilitate the learning process by helping learners develop social skills such as decision making, trust-building and conflict management skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1999a). Students should learn how to accommodate differences in ability, so they can support each other and benefit from the various skills they have, but stronger students should not be forced to work with weaker ones or coach them. One way to achieve group heterogeneity in an unintrusive way is simply to ask students to make groups with students they have not worked with before or make a rule that they cannot work with the same student more than once a month. It is also important that the teacher ensures that every student gets to be a recorder.

Finally, the students need to be reassured that assessment of their work will be fair. The assessment should emphasize the individual accountability of each member. It is important that students understand they cannot get "a free ride" on the work of others, but also that they will not be penalized for other students' low level of performance. One criterion for student assessment can be their cooperative skills – how much they contribute to the group, whether they assist other students in meaningful and productive ways, and so on. While the students work on reconstruction, the teacher collects data about the quality of explanations, interaction patterns among group members, students' social skills, efforts to work together cooperatively, reasoning processes and problem solving strategies. The teacher then provides feedback and coaching. As Johnson and Johnson (1999b:168) point out, cooperative learning groups can be seen as "...windows into students' minds". In this respect, the dictogloss approach offers a significant advantage compared to other, more traditional listening comprehension tasks. Students' answers on a conventional test or homework assignments tell teachers very little about students' reasoning processes and understanding. The dictogloss allows teachers to go "deep" into students listening comprehension and evaluate how well students can absorb and sort the content they hear. It provides an environment in which assessment becomes a part of the learning process. Students learn almost as much from assessing their own work and their classmates' work as they do from completing the reconstruction task. Another way of assessing students' work is by asking them to keep a journal where they discuss and reflect on their learning experiences. Journals allow both teachers and learners to verify whether learning is taking place and also to identify the elements in the procedure that may need to be adjusted. Regardless of which assessment method is adopted, it is vital that assessment criteria are clearly explained to the students.

## 8. Conclusion

The dictogloss method combines conventional teaching procedures such as topical warm-up, explicit vocabulary instruction and possibly grammar correction with a new type of meaning-based listening activity and cooperative learning. A dictogloss listening class embodies several important principles of language learning such as learner autonomy, cooperation among learners, focus on meaning and self and peer-assessment. Process is equally as important as product. The procedure entails both language decoding (dictation) and its encoding (reconstruction) and, as a result, enhances both students' listening and communication skills. It pushes learners to produce a meaningful and accurate text and to reflect on their choices. The task provides students with a sense of achievement and personal accountability and encourages them to think about the process of language learning and how to approach it more effectively. In short, if implemented correctly, the dictogloss approach results in active involvement of the students and offers a challenging and rewarding learning experience.

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**Appendix (Sample Lesson)**

**(Preparation Stage)**

Warm-up Discussion

Instructions: Work in pairs or small groups and discuss the questions below.

1.What kind of food do you like?

2. How healthy are your eating habits?

3. Do you prefer to eat out or at home?

4. What is the most unusual food you have tried?

5. Do you like ethnic food?

6. What do you know about eating and drinking habits in Muslim countries?

7. What kind of dish is *couscou*s? Where does it come from?

  What do you think today's listening will be about?

**Vocabulary**

*1. to pour* = to make a liquid flow from a container in a continuous stream

        e.g.   She **poured the sauce over** pasta.

*2. bowl* = a deep round dish with a wide open top used especially for holding food or liquid

        e.g. Could you pass me **a salad bowl**?

*3. custom* = an accepted way of behaving or of doing things in a society or a community

        e.g. **It is    the custom** in that country for women to marry young.

*4. thumb* = the short thick finger at the side of the hand slightly apart from the other four.

        Although she is eight, she still **sucks her thumb** when she is worried.

*5. carpet* = a thick woollen or artificial fabric for covering floors or stairs

        e.g. She bought a **new Persian carpet** for her living room.

*6. cushion* = a fabric bag filled with soft material or feathers that is used, for example, to make a seat more

        comfortable

        e.g. She bought **matching curtains and cushions**.

**Collocation Crossword**

**Instructions:** Complete the crossword below with a suitable word from the list. The clues are the collocations that go with each of the target words. Sometimes you may need to change the form of the word. (*For the crossword use the basic dictionary form; i.e. the form given in the word list.)

Words:    *to pour    bowl    custom    thumb    carpet    cushion*

**Across**

**2.**    **Persian** _____ are **hand-woven**. Just because a _____ is **thicker**, it doesn't mean it will last longer.

**4.**    There are many **interesting** _____ in Japan. Moroccan people **observe** many **traditional** _____.

**5.**    She **filled** a _____ of **soup**. Moroccan **ceramic** _____ are famous in the world.

**Down**

**1.**    I picked up the beetle carefully **between finger an**d _____.

   He smiled and **raised a** _____ in greeting.

**2.**    In a Middle-Eastern room you can see many **floor** _____. He sank back into the **soft** _____ of the sofa.

**3.**    It is a custom that someone _____ **water** over a guest's hands.

I _____ **wine** into your glass by mistake.
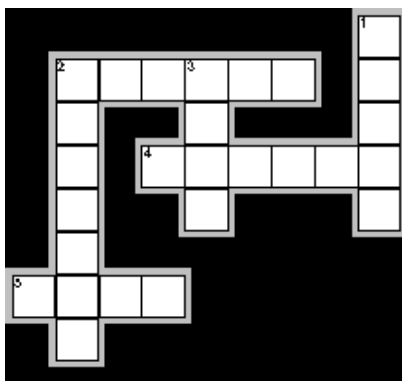


**Reconstruction Checklist:**

Were these words used in the reconstruction?    **(1 point each)**

bowl          [   ]

carpet        [   ]

cushion       [   ]

custom        [   ]

pour          [   ]

thumb         [   ]

Were these ideas included in the reconstruction?

| 1 pt (fully) | .5 (partially) | 0 (not at all) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | There are many interesting customs when you eat a traditional Moroccan meal. |
| | | | You eat in a room with cushions and pillows… |
| | | | …..and thick carpets on the floor. |
| | | | The food is on low tables. |
| | | | Before you sit down, you should shake hands with everyone. |
| | | | Start with a person on your right… |
| | | | ….and go around the room. |
| | | | You need to wash your hands. |
| | | | Hold hands over a big bowl…. |
| | | | while someone pours water over them. |
| | | | Before anyone can eat, the host says *Bismillah*..... |
| | | | …which means "Praise be to God" |
| | | | The host serves the foods in a certain order. |
| | | | Moroccan food is famous for its stews of meat or fish…. |
| | | | ….cooked with fruits or vegetables. |
| | | | The most famous food is couscous…. |
| | | | …a dish cooked in a spicy sauce. |
| | | | People usually have water to drink. |
| | | | You eat with your thumb and first three fingers of your right hand. |
| | | | After eating you wash your hands again. |
| | | | Everyone enjoys a cup of mint tea. |

TOTAL: _____ / 27

**Transcript**

There are many interesting customs when you eat a traditional Moroccan meal.    Now, generally, you eat in a room with cushions and pillows and thick carpets on the floor. The food is on low tables.

Before you sit down, you should shake hands with everyone. You should start with the person on your right and go around the room. Next, you need to wash your hands. You hold them over a big bowl while someone pours water over them. Before anyone can eat, the host says *Bismillah,* which means "Praise be to God."

Your host serves the foods in a certain order. Moroccan food is famous for its stews of meat or fish cooked with fruits or vegetables. Of course, the most famous food is couscous, a dish cooked in a spicy sauce. People usually have water to drink.

At a Moroccan table, you eat with your hand. You should use your thumb and your first three fingers of your right hand. After eating you wash your hands again. Finally, everyone enjoys a cup of mint tea together.

(from: Leo Jones (2001). *Let's Talk 1* © Cambridge University Press – reproduced by permission)

# Investigating the Perception of Student Teachers in Hong Kong

# Towards Peer-editing

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**Abstract**

Despite its popularity in other countries, like America and Canada, peer editing is considered quite 'avant-garde' in the Hong Kong academic community and has never been a common practice in local secondary schools' classrooms. This paper will try to unveil the reasons why a number of Hong Kong English teachers are reluctant to use peer-editing. It is hypothesized that any positive experience of peer editing among teachers themselves is an impetus to use peer editing in class. Based on this hypothesis, a brief survey was carried out to examine a group of fifteen student-teachers' attitudes who had taken a second language writing course in a graduate school's setting, in which peer-editing activities of each other's work over six weeks, in six one-hour blocks, were conducted. Reservations concerning adopting peer-editing were observed among the student-teachers' future classes. All forms of resistance and reservations, according to the participants, were claimed to derive from external constraints. A closer look, however, suggests that none of these given constraints were purely external. Rather, I believe these teachers might have either been prejudiced or neglected 'locus of control', which refers to the possible control and power a teacher possess over their classes. This paper looks at both the teachers' personalities, characterized by skeptical beliefs in peer-editing, and the external constraints from the local social situations that contribute to the resistance and reluctance of teachers implementing peer editing in Hong Kong's education institutions.

**Keywords:** Locus of control, Peer editing, External constraints, Teachers' personality

## 1. Introduction

Peer editing is believed to enhance students' learning through larger amounts of feedback and shorter periods of time needed than feedback given by their teachers (Gibbs, 1999, cited in Liu & Carless, 2006). In addition, peer editing enriches the information pool for a learner's later self-assessment used for individual language development (Boud, 1995, cited in Liu & Carless, 2006). More importantly, it opens up the opportunity to learn from individual domain to public domain by engaging a real audience. Despite its many merits, the practice of peer-editing tends to be unknown or forgone by teachers and students in Hong Kong. The issue is intriguing to me because it was only in a university writing class at master level was I introduced and exposed to this collaborative writing approach. I could see a great deal of potential benefits for my future students but it puzzled me that none of my teachers in my earlier education taught or encouraged the practice of peer editing. The question is why peer editing is still considered 'innovative' to the majority of teachers and students in local secondary schools.

Heron and Curtis (1999) pointed out that "one of the possible reasons for this approach still being innovative in Hong Kong schools might relate to the fact that so few teachers had any experience of it while they themselves were in school, particularly at primary school" (p 109-110). In other words, by the time teachers receive peer editing training at university or other higher education institutions, they are still very unfamiliar with the practice. In response to this, a post-course questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was distributed to a group of fifteen student teachers who had participated in a university masters course called *Second Language Writing* where they needed to participate in peer-editing each other's essays over six weeks, in six one-hour blocks. Most of them were practicing teachers in secondary schools while some of them (five out of fifteen) were full-time students. Among all the students, eight of them responded to the questionnaire. One of them was interviewed in order to elicit further information. In addition, two students who received their education in America were interviewed to gather data as a contrast to the local voices.

The objective of the study was modified slightly because of the student-teachers lacking peer editing knowledge and experience. The study originally intended to investigate the *change* of students' perceptions towards peer-editing and the likelihood of using it in their classes after they peer-edited their colleagues' essays. Later, it was changed to studying the students' perception towards peer-editing, and the likelihood of using peer-editing in their classrooms after a brief and initial exposure. Of course, whether teachers will use peer-editing approach later in their classes depend on many different sets of factors, both internal and external. Although the significance of external factors should not be ignored, the present paper, however will focus on the discussion of internal factors which are often neglected by teaching practitioners, especially those who taught in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. This approach, I must

nevertheless concede, necessarily skirts some arguments that may be deemed important and may even present an incomplete picture of the whole situation happening in Hong Kong's education system; however, by the same token, it allows for more focused discussions.

## 2. Rationale of the study

The rationale of the study is that the student-teachers who have tried peer-editing among themselves should be more likely to see its benefits than those who have not and thus they should be more willing to apply it in their classes. It hypothesizes that any positive experience of peer editing among teachers themselves would result in a higher likelihood of their using peer editing in class. The objective of the present paper is therefore to examine their perceptions of peer-editing after the course and see how their previous classroom experiences affect the likelihood of applying peer-editing in their future classrooms. This paper will also explore the conditions that are necessary for teachers to start using peer-editing, and make some general suggestions for teaching practitioners.

It must be pointed out that no generalization about the perception towards peer-editing approach at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) can be made until more thorough research is done on each level. This paper hopes to contribute to the existing knowledge on the perception of student-teachers from secondary schools towards the approach after they practiced peer-editing among themselves.

## 3. Findings

Eight out of fifteen questionnaires were finally received (See Appendix 1). Among the received questionnaire, it showed that only one out of eight student-teachers had tried to use peer-editing in her writing class before the course. After the course, three of them said they would try to use peer-editing, another three said they might use some form of peer editing in their classes, while two of them said they would not use peer-editing unless *the external constraints* are solved. This indicates two things.

First, after practicing peer-editing among themselves no participants showed resistance to using peer-editing by making negative remarks. This to a large extent is thanks to the successful implementation of peer-evaluation and fostering of an atmosphere of mutual-learning by the instructor, Ms Liu Ngar Fun. Those who said "yes" in Question 4 of the questionnaire: *After taking this course, would you use peer-editing in your classroom?* went on to explain by giving their reasons in Question 5: *Referring to Question 4, why/ why not?* Appreciation of the benefits of peer-editing was noticed. The following are some of the positive remarks:

*"Peer-editing can let students identify problems themselves."*

*"It [peer-editing] seems beneficial. During the process, students can learn something concrete."*

Second, positive experience alone, nevertheless, is not sufficient for teachers to adopt peer-editing. In other words, it is only one of the necessary conditions. There are other factors which may be equally important in order for peer-editing to be used in Hong Kong classrooms. Again, Question 5 sheds light on these factors. Those who answered "no" or "maybe" to Question 4, explained their reservations and resistance in the next question. Since one of the factors that affect student teachers' choices of either using peer-editing or not lies in how they view it socially and theoretically. Therefore, it is worthwhile to see the reasons why they chose against it. Their remarks are listed as follows.

*"It [peer-editing] is too time-consuming and most students believe in teachers, not classmates."*

*"The class size is too large. It is too time-consuming."*

*"Most students do not trust their peers' comments."*

*"The students are lacking in enough linguistic knowledge."*

*"The Education authority, the school and the English panel do not advocate this practice."*

*"Changes are likely to occur only when the Education authority, the school as well as the English panel start advocating peer review in HK English classrooms."*

### 3.1 The Locus of Control

Rotter's (1954) social learning theory of personality triggered the investigation of people's beliefs in where control over their actions lie. The concept of locus of control can be understood with two sets of extremes. They can be either 'internal', which means a person believes that he/she has direct influence on events happening, or 'external', that is, a person believes that factors out of his/her control contributes to events. In reality, people's locus of control often lies in somewhere between the two extremes; however the differentiation between the two extremes helps shed some light into the following investigation of teachers' responses.

The reasons that peer-editing is not likely to be used can be summarized in a table (See Table 1). They fall into two categories: the external factors and the internal factors. The former has to do with the environment (i.e. time constraints, class size, training and etc.) while the latter has to do with attitudes and perceptions, that is, how teachers view

peer-editing. Furthermore, the former is related to the recognition of the feasibility of peer editing (questions of how) while the latter is the confirmation of the necessity and benefits of peer-editing (questions of why).

It is necessary that both the favorable external and internal conditions have to be achieved for teachers to begin using peer-editing. If teachers do not foresee any benefits of using peer-editing, it will be unlikely that they apply it in their classes. If a teacher sees the necessity and benefit of it but with many unfavorable external conditions, it can be very difficult for him to apply peer-editing in his classroom.

Ostensibly, the data coming from Questions 4 and 5 "After taking this course, would you use peer-editing in your classroom, why/ why not?" suggest that all of the reasons they provided seemed to be *external*, and none was concerned with negative attitudes towards peer-editing. However, a closer look reveals that part of the reasons they gave might not be purely external but rather a mixture of both external and internal factors if not entirely internal.

**4. Discussion**

In the following section, I am going to go into details of the responses gathered from the questionnaire and the interview. Suggestions to solve any difficulties will also be made.

*4.1 External constraints*

4.1.1 Perceived time constraint:

Peer editing is more complex than traditional teachers' markings. Drafting and revising also take up more time than ordinary product-oriented approaches. A feeling of insufficient time for practicing peer-editing was generally observed from the data collected.

In the communication, a teacher said it is impossible for her to use peer-editing because of the limited class time (A. Hui, personal communication, April 17, 2007). When asked about how much time was needed in a follow-up interview, she said she had no idea as she was inexperienced. It seemed that the perceived difficulties and barriers originated from a lack of experience and training.

It should be noted that some successful cases of exercising peer-editing in tight schedules can be made known to the student teachers, so they can be convinced of the possibility of peer-editing by seeing some successful models. Pennington, Brock & Yue (1996) managed to implement process writing project in eight Hong Kong secondary classes in three phases of process writing with each phase being four or more lessons. Heron & Curtis (1999) succeeded in incorporating a six-hour unit on process writing in three weeks. Ho (2006) wrote the following remarks:

"It seems that this program [employing the process approach to teach writing in six Hong Kong primary classrooms] was workable from the Primary 3 to Primary 5 level. From this study, it can be seen that the program could be successfully implemented within a tight schedule (a double lesson each week for seven weeks) and a tight syllabus in all the schools, though it would be more desirable if the duration of the program could be longer"(p. 18).

Ho's study was to mainly investigate the effects and perception of the process approach rather than peer-editing, which is just a small portion of the overall approach and serves as a means to achieve independent writing. Nevertheless, its success is a manifestation of the feasibility of the process-approach, although one can argue that the approach may not work in a specific teaching context, like Hong Kong's secondary education; however, with proper training and successful paradigms to model after, teachers should have a way to implement peer-editing in their classrooms without having to worry about the process being too "time-consuming". University and education institutes also share the responsibility of letting their students know the successful cases of implementing peer-editing so that they would not be intimidated and feel they are the only ones who are carrying out the 'innovative' tasks.

4.1.2 Large class size:

Two respondents wrote that they felt the big class-size was a problem for peer-editing. A respondent said in the follow-up interview that she not only had to help students on their individual papers, but also had to monitor all the students and control the class discipline during the peer-editing process.

*"We have to monitor the students' discipline. Be practical. We have to mark their essays anyway. It would not make our work any easier. On the contrary, monitoring students' work [work during peer-editing] increases our workload"* (A. Hui, personal communication, April 17, 2007).

In other words, the effort made in monitoring the students while they peer-edit other students' papers combined with the effort it takes for teachers to help students on their individual papers adds up to more effort than the teachers are willing to make. It is true that if the students are too recalcitrant and keep disturbing the class, they will do that anyway, not only limited to a peer-editing class. So, discipline issues are not necessarily limited to a class on peer-editing. Interestingly, the same respondent also admitted that this monitoring pressure, being a technical problem and not a problem of peer editing per se, could be solved by providing training for students at an early stage of their education, so that students would know what to do and what not to do. This can help avoid students' idling away precious time during

in-class peer-editing because they are not 'occupied'. But how much time is needed to train students?

There are different suggestions on the time needed for a peer-training period, during which time students are taught how to give and receive peer-feedback. A few writers have recommended complete peer-feedback training (Manglesdorf, 1992; Brock, 1994; Garratt, 1995; Cheng & Warren 1996, cited in Heron & Curtis, 1999). Others found that a shorter period of peer-training (see Miller & Ng, 1994, cited in Heron & Curtis, 1999) is desirable. A plausible conclusion to draw is that it is up to the discretion of teachers to apply a suitable amount of time on training their students for peer-editing based on the objective of the peer-editing tasks and the language standards of the students.

I contend that the goal of peer-editing should be made very clear in order to facilitate the process. The more specific a task is, the easier and better the task is managed. For example, for primary students, peer-editing on punctuation is a reasonable and manageable task according to their level.

In addition, there are some useful and easy materials available for teachers to facilitate more effective peer-editing. A simple example of an introduction sheet explaining its purposes and the correct attitude and behavior is given by Hyland (2003, p202). A peer response sheet is also provided by Hyland (2003, p211). These are easy to complete and manageable for teachers and learners. Through these aids, learners know the focus of what they are looking for and time and effort can be saved from monitoring students in a big class.

It should be noted that the success of peer editing in one set of circumstances may not be transferable to another set of circumstances. The local teaching context and culture that the student teachers are in can be greatly different from one another in terms of class size, students' standards of English, etc. Nevertheless, it is the teachers who should bear the responsibility of putting forth the time and effort in developing the concrete ideas for exercising peer-editing in their classes. It will be better for teachers to 'tailor-make' peer-editing in their own class settings based on different factors such as given time constraints, their students' standards of English and the goal of peer-editing.

4.1.3 Unequal power relation:

The final external constraint claimed by the student-teachers is the unequal power relation between teachers and the Authority. A number of teachers expressed concern that peer-editing had long been disregarded by the school and the authority.

*"The Education authority, the school and the English panel do not advocate this practice."*

*"Changes are likely to occur when the Education authority, the school and the English panel start advocating peer review in HK English classrooms."*

It is conceivable that some schools may not be very supportive in teachers' exercising peer-editing; however, this fact alone is not a convincing argument that the practice should be forsaken without an attempt to experiment it. By saying the problem is "not on my side" or something is "out of my control", some teachers in Hong Kong could be seen as uninvolved and without a crucial role to play. Most teacher I believe would concede there are degrees of flexibility in teaching. When it comes to freedom in the classroom, Hong Kong is not necessarily more confining than other countries. Anecdotal evidence from an interview with two overseas students indicates that schools in the United States do not have clear stipulated guidance for teachers either. In other words, it is to a large extent up to the individual teachers' preference to apply peer-editing or not. Their words may perhaps shed some light to the situation in Hong Kong.

*"It is individual teachers' decision to try [peer-editing] or not to try. Usually, teachers who use peer-editing are regarded as better teachers. Those who don't are seen as lazy and not up to his job"* (T. Foley, personal communication, March, 28, 2007).

*"Peer-editing was used in my middle school a lot. But there were some teachers who did not use it though. The school did not tell the teachers what to do or what not to do. It is a teacher, who teaches, not the school"* (J. Chan, personal communication, April, 22, 2007).

On the school administrative side, although there is little data or evidence to show how much pressure exerted from a higher power entity (the Authority) on a lower entity (teachers) may lead to a depletion of freedom thus leading to the abandonment of one's teaching philosophy, it is nevertheless a good idea for the school to provide more freedom, flexibility and support to teachers in exercising their individual teaching philosophies.

On the teachers' side, it may be true that the external constraints may contribute to a certain degree of reluctance in applying peer-editing in classrooms; however, teachers should at the very least consider whether these constraints are really exerted by an external body or just their own idiosyncratic predispositions or unjustified and convenient excuses, rooted in their individual teaching preferences due to a dearth of practical experience in peer-editing. Above all, are the so-called external factors merely external or are they bound to be affected by the internal side of teaching practitioners?

This paradox of 'dichotomy' will be discussed in the rest of the essay.

*4.2 Internal factors*

4.2.1 Attitude and perception-Failing to see the benefits:

Perception is how people conceptualize their surroundings and environment. Positive attitudes towards peer-editing are one of the factors that will lead to the decision of applying it in class. Doubts of the feasibility of peer-editing, for example, the wild conjecture that pupils may lack the knowledge and competence, were observed among the respondents and should be addressed before any assertions against the external constraints made, as the perceptions determine whether or not a teacher is willing to tackle the objective constraints. In other words, before teachers use peer-editing in class, they have to see its benefits first so that they are willing to keep adjusting the process of peer-editing and try their best to overcome any practical difficulties ahead.

4.2.2 Lack of knowledge:

The concern of a lack of knowledge of language skills was noticed among student teachers. Let us go back to the following comments from the student teachers.

*"The students are lacking in enough linguistic knowledge."*

*"Most students do not trust their peers' comments."*

In addition to this, the perceived expertise is also a problem. The wish that students preferred teachers' corrections to peer-comments was expressed in several questionnaires collected. Interestingly enough, these comments were from those teachers who had not used peer-editing before. The thought of the plausible lack of knowledge or competence in the students is at best some mere conjecture or at worst some perverse perceptions of difficulties in peer-editing, which are not buttressed up with empirical evidence or practical experience of teachers' using peer-editing. It may be true that if they had tried peer-editing in class, they might not have doubted the students' ability and preference as much as they do now.

As for the students' abilities and competence in using peer-editing, it should be noted that the purpose of which, other than the ultimate aim of developing their language competence, is to develop the ability to reflect on their own work, to critically view their peers' work and eventually to make peer-editing as a habitual and routine activity so that they can further improve the target language by themselves later. Another point that should not be overlooked is that the ability of peer-editing develops over a period of time. It does not do justice for novice-writers to bear all the responsibility for the results of peer editing in a relatively short period of time. Although it may be true that some students do not fully acquire all the necessary language skills for peer-editing's purpose, it does not necessarily follow that peer-editing per se is infeasible as the success of which mainly rely on the level of targets teachers and students set.

Falchikov & Goldfinch (2000) carried out a meta-analysis of 48 quantitative peer assessment studies by comparing peer and teacher marks and demonstrating that students are generally able to make reasonably reliable judgments. It may help the teacher to ease their worries if they are made aware of this information. Furthermore, teachers should give sufficient introduction to students explaining the purpose and goal in peer-editing and exhibiting the vicarious confidence in them even before peer-editing starts. I contend that peer-editing can be implemented with ease as long as the objectives of the peer-editing are thoroughly negotiated, clearly stated and firmly based on the students' standards of English prior to its commencement.

Research has already found out the relationship between students' attitudes and teachers' attitudes towards a teaching practice. Pennington (1996) found that the students' feelings towards process-writing are influenced by the teacher's attitudes in the onset of the project. In other words, if a teacher holds positive opinions and show more enthusiasm about peer-editing, their students are likely to be affected and feel the same way as the teacher does. If the teacher truly believes peer-editing is beneficial to the students, then students will also find the process worth their time and effort. To a large extent, it is true that teachers bear most of the responsibility in fostering a conducive atmosphere and helping students to form a correct perception of the required expertise.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, resistance and reservations towards adopting peer-editing in classes were observed among the student-teachers upon completion of a second language writing course, which had peer-editing one of its teaching approaches. Both the objective constraints from the teaching context and the subjective teachers' skeptical opinions about peer-editing are believed to lead to the reluctance of teachers implementing peer editing. It seems that when it comes to peer-editing, there are many concerns about the problems of external constraints. At first glance, from the results of the questionnaire, a perceived constraint of time, large class-size, and unsupportive superiors were ostensibly the factors provided by the teachers in explaining why they felt so reluctant in using peer-editing.

A close scrutiny, however, reveals that the teachers were hesitant in implementing such a process-oriented approach in

writing not because of the mere external factors, but in fact, of a combination or a continuum of both the external and internal factors. The internal factors include the opinions of peer-editing held by both the teachers and students. The teachers' concern about the external factors, e.g. time or class-size, was coupled by their perception of how beneficial and feasible they viewed the approach to be. I contend that however teachers feel about the process, they should consider which of the external constraints (if any) or internal resistance, are preponderant factors in not using peer-editing. This may help to purge themselves of any prejudices arising from their individual preferences.

If these perceived internal and external factors are left unattended, the chances of teachers implementing peer-editing in their classrooms are slim. To overcome these barriers, there are several steps the teachers could take.

*5.1 Tips to implement peer-editing successfully*

The local teaching context that the student teachers are in can be very different from one another in terms of the class size, students' standards of English and etc. Therefore, it is a better idea for teachers to 'tailor-make' peer-editing to suit their own classes based on the level of time constraints, students' standards of English and, most importantly, the goal of peer-editing.

It will be a good idea for the school to give more room and freedom for teachers to apply their own teaching philosophy. The more passionate the teacher is concerning his/her subject, the more impassioned the students will likely be. The difference between a product-oriented approach and a process-oriented approach is that in the product-oriented class, teachers are required to teach towards a specific test or paper, the eventual product, short-term and easily forgotten; but, a process-oriented class is one that focuses on growth, not only of the product itself, but also the creator. Teachers who are free to apply their own teaching methods are able to teach students using methods they will remember for the rest of their lives.

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**Appendix 1**

*A study on student teachers' perception of peer editing in a university course of SLW*

1.   Did you participate in the peer-editing for at least two out of the three 30-minute papers?

2.   Before taking this course, did you use peer-editing in your classroom?

3.   Referring to the question 2, why/ why not?

4.   After taking this course, would you use peer-editing in your classroom?

5.   Referring to the question 4, why/ why not?

6.   If there is any change in your view, what would you think is the most probable reasons for the change?

**Appendix 2**

Table 1. A comparison of External factors and Internal factors

|  | External factors | Internal factors |
|---|---|---|
| Examples | *e.g. Time, class size, local culture, tradition and practice of individual schools and settings* | *e.g. Attitudes and perception of peer-editing held by individual teachers* |
| Skeptical beliefs about peer editing held by teachers | Feasibility of peer-editing -How | Benefits of peer-editing -Why |

From the table, we can see the external side concerned with feasibility, and the internal side concerned with benefits. If the adverse external factors can be nicely avoided, e.g. the problems with class size and time constraints, then it would mean the feasibility issue is also addressed. That is, the question "*How can we implement peer-editing*?" is answered. If the favorable internal factors are satisfied, that is, for teachers to hold positive opinions about peer-editing, then the question of "*Why should we implement peer-editing?*" must be answered first.

# A Survey of the Measurements of Morphological Productivity

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**Abstract**

Morphological productivity is one of the key issues in the study of derivational morphology. This paper makes a survey of the quantitative measurements of morphological productivity so far proposed by different scholars, and tentatively attempts to point out the pros and cons and also feasibility of each measurement, with a view to provide some assistance for the future researcher who is going to carry out the study in this field.

**Keywords:** Morphological productivity, Type, Token, Hapax

## 1. Introduction

Morphological Productivity is central to the study of word-formation. It means different things to different people. The various views can be outlined as follows, as Bauer(2001, p.12) puts it in his book *Morphological Productivity*: a) Affixes are productive: The property of an affix to be used to coin new complex words is referred as productivity.(Ingo Plag,2003,p.44;Lulofs,1835,p.157,cited in Schultink, 1992a,p.189;Fleischer,1975,p.71). b) Morphological processes are productive: A property of the morphological process to give rise to new formations on a systematic basis.(Ingo Plag,2004;Uhlenbeck 1978,p.4;Anderson,1982,p.585).c)Rules are productive (Aroboff,1976,p.36;Zwanenburg,1980, p.248;Bakken,1998,p.28).d). Words are productive: (Saussure, 1969, p.228). Though there is a disagreement in the literature as to what it is that is productive, the quantitative study of the productivity is mostly centered on the affix' productivity. Various quantitative measurements have been proposed by different scholars, of which some are testing the past productivity, while some assessing the potential productivity. It should be pointed out that productivity is a diachronic phenomenon, which means that for a certain affix, it might be very productive in the past to produce a great many words, like *–ment*; however, nowadays hardly any new words are coined by using this suffix, thus becoming unproductive. This paper makes a survey of the quantitative measurements of morphological productivity so far proposed by different scholars, and tentatively attempts to point out the pros and cons and also feasibility of each measurement, with a view to provide some assistance for the future researcher who is going to carry out the study in this field.

## 2. Measurements of Morphological Productivity

### 2.1 Aronoff' model

Aronoff (1976, p.36, cited from Bauer, 2001) attempts to calculate the ratio of the actual words produced by a word-formation rule (WFR) to potential words produced by that rule. His belief behind this is that 'count up the number of words one feel could occur as the output of a WFR(which one can do by counting the number of possible bases),count up the actually occurring words formed by that rule, take the ratio of the two and then compare this with another WFR'. The formula is given as bellow:

$$I = \frac{v}{s}$$

Where *I* is the index of productivity; *v* is the number of actual/attested types, and *s* is the number of the types which the WFR could give rise to. Theoretical as well as practical problems have been pointed out by Bayeen and Lieber (1991, p.803; cited from Bauer, 2001, p.145): Firstly, the identification of the number of the existing types of a WFR is problematic. Even though V could be identified in some fixed corpus, it's not always clear whether the corpus is exhaustive of all actual types; secondly, the number of the potential bases of a WFR is hard to define given the various restrictions on the bases. In terms of many problems encountered when using this model to calculate the productivity of a WFR, It's practically unfeasible and therefore rejected in this paper.

### 2.2 Frequency models

Frequency models are based on the assumption that frequency is related to productivity, either directly or indirectly. The term 'frequency' means the number of times that a word occurs in a corpus. Three different models concerning

frequency will be introduced briefly, including type frequency, token frequency and relative frequency.

2.2.1 Type Frequency

People seem to hold the view that an affix is much more productive if a large amount of words were produced by using it. Therefore, one of the most widely used measure in literature is a straight count of the number of the attested types (the number of different words)with that affix at a given period of time, so is the name given as 'type frequency'. This measure is also at the same time mostly rejected by scholars, for the reason that an affix may give rise to many words in the past, but nowadays people may seldom use it to produce new words. An example of such an affix suggested by scholars is the suffix *–ment*, which in early centuries gave rise to many new words, and many of them are still in use at present, but today's speakers hardly employ it to create new words, so it would be considered rather unproductive. (Ingo Plag, 2003, p.52) However, the author holds that this measure would be better labeled as testing the past productivity of an affix at a given point of time.

2.2.2 Token Frequency

Since type frequency has its disadvantage in measuring productivity, another way to view the degree of productivity is to take token frequency into account. Bayeen (1993, cited from Ingo Plag, 2003) discussed the relationship between frequency and productivity. His main ideas are outlined as follows: A productive morphological process is characterized by a preponderance of words with rather low-frequency and a small number of high-frequency words, whereas unproductive processes with a large number of high-frequency words and small number of low-frequency words. This seems puzzled logically, however, the reasoning behind this is that: high-frequency complex words (e.g. *disadvantage* with a frequency of 1127 in BNC) are likely to be stored as whole words in the mental lexicon, and low-frequency complex words are to be stored with its decomposed parts. The reason that a newly-coined complex word (e.g. *dis-represent* with a frequency of 1 in BNC)can be understood by people who never encountered before is that people are more inclined to decompose the word into its parts, compute the meaning of its constituent morpheme, and then infer the meaning of the complex word. If this decomposition process is repeated over and over again, the representation of the affix is strengthened and made it much more readily to form new derivatives. On the contrary, for a process with large number of high-frequency words, the retrieval of the words from the mental lexicon follows the whole-word route,[1]which will not strengthen the representation of the affix, thus make it less likely to combine to other bases to form new derivatives (Ingo Plag,2003,pp.48-55).

2.2.3 Relative Frequency

Relative frequency takes into consideration the frequency of both the derived and the lexical bases, with the assumption that a process is more productive if comparatively the frequency of the derived is less than the frequency of the lexical bases, otherwise it's less productive. The explication for this is again related to the whole word access. Any reader interested in this issue can refer to Hay and Baayen (2002, p.204; 2003, pp.102-4) who gave detailed elucidation. This measure is to divide the frequency of the derived by the frequency of the lexical bases. The higher the figure, the less productive the process or the affix is. However, when in practical application several methodological problems arise. Firstly, how to calculate the frequency of lexical bases of a morphological process, since it's not so easy a question to sum the number of the frequency of each lexical base, let alone how many bases there will be. Secondly, can this measure authentically reflect the truth even if the above methodological problem can be cleared away? What if the following case is presented: for some words with the given affix, the derivatives are more frequent than the bases, while for others, the derivatives are less frequent than the bases? Therefore, this measure need further to be improved and developed.

*2.3 Probabilistic model*

Probabilistic models were proposed mainly by scholar Baayen. (1989; Baayen and Lieber 1991, p.819; 1992; cited from Bauer, 2001, p.154).The set of models statistically measure the probability of encountering a new word by a given morphological process. In probabilistic models, the calculation of the productivity is indispensably involved a crucial facor-hapax legomema(or hapax for short).Hapax are words that occur only once in a corpus. According to Baayen, if one wants to study the productivity, then it's important to study hapax.One may ponder to ask why, and what is the relationship between productivity and hapax? Plag (2003, p.54) suggested the reason that "…the number of hapaxes of a given morphological category should correlate with the number of the neologisms of that category, so the number of hapaxes can be seen as an indicator of productivity. Though Bauer(2001,p.150)raised the doubt that why hapaxes in a corpus should correspond in any meaningful way to coinages in real use, for Inevitable is that in a corpus there exist some hapaxes out of tag errors and misspelling. Anoroff discussed the importance of hapaxes in the book *What is Morphology?* He pointed out that the hapaxes in a corpus are more likely to have been formed by a productive process. The writer goes along with the view, thinking that hapaxes are mostly produced unconsciously by community members following some morphological rules, accordingly, large amount of the hapaxes of a given morphological category can indirectly indicate the productivity, even though the following possibility can not be eliminated that the corpus is too

small to include some hapaxes which are actually common words and familiar to the community members. Therefore, in order to make sure the accuracy of the results, the corpus would better be large enough. The probabilistic models have three phases, each of which will be tackled briefly in the following.

2.3.1 The first phase: P in the narrow sense (Baayen, 1989).The formula is as follows:

$$P = \frac{n_1}{N}$$

Where P is the index of productivity; $n_1$ is the number of words formed by the appropriate process occurring only once (the hapax) and $N$ is the total token frequency of words created by that morphological process in the corpus.

2.3.2 The second phase:

Since the first phase doesn't take type frequency into account, Baayen (1989; Baayen and Liber 1991, p.817ff; Baayen 1992, pp.122-125; cited from Bauer, 2001) in this phrase reintroduces this in a measure of 'global productivity.' He adopts a two-dimensional chart to show the productivity of a given affix, with the horizontal axis indicating the P in the narrow sense, and the vertical axis indicating the type frequency, see the following figure:

Insert Figure 1 Here

From the chart, one can have a visual impression of productivities of different morphological processes. Those dots located in left-bottom corner show the lower productivity, while that in top-right hand show higher productivity. However, this measure still could not escape the fate of objections by some scholars, even Baayen (1992, p.24) admits, it's not possible to weight the relative contributions of the vertical and horizontal dimensions in such a chart. In view of this, Bayyen (1993, p.192) proposes yet another measure which he terms 'the hapax-conditioned degree of productivity.

2.3.3 The third phrase: the hapax-conditioned degree of productivity. Baayen formulizes it as:

$$P* = \frac{n_{1,E,t}}{h_t}$$

Where $E$ indicates the appropriate morphological category, $t$ indicates the number of tokens in the corpus and $h$ is the number of hapaxes. This measure computes the ratio of the number of hapaxes with a given morphological category with the total number of the hapaxes in the corpus. Since the denominator (total number of the hapaxes in the corpus) is a constant value, the P* value is dependant on the hapaxes of the given morphological category. This measure tests 'expanding productivity' (Baayen, 1992), while 'P in the narrow sense' is labeled as testing the potential productivity.Baayen gives an interesting metaphor to show the difference between the two productivities. A rule that is productive in the first sense is like a company that is expanding on a market (no matter whether the company has a large share of the market or not. A company may have a large share of the market, but if there are hardly any buyers because the market is saturated, the company is in danger of going out of business, so the measure **'P in the narrow sense'** gauges the extent to which the market for a category is saturated.

Apart from the measures outlined above, some other measurements are proposed by scholar Stekauer, which he terms as 'the onamasiological model.' This measure is distinct from the above in that it goes from meaning to form rather than from form to meaning. For more about this measure, the readers who are interested can refer to Stekauer (cited from Jesús Fernández-Domínguez, 2007).

## 3. Conclusions

Scholars have been trying to provide an effective way of accessing the productivity of affixes quantitatively. However, it seems that no one of the measurements is hardly without any objections, either theoretical or in practical application. Nevertheless, those varied measures could be seen as showing productivity from different aspects; they are more taken as indicating the productivity in a comprehensive and multi-angle point of view rather than contradictory to each other.

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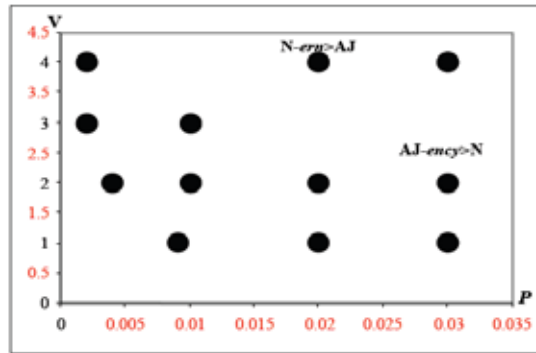Plag, Ingo. (2003). *Word Formation in English*. Cambridge: University Press.

Figure 1. Global Productivity of a Number of English Word-formation

(This chart is taken from Jesús Fernández-Domínguez, 2007)

# Children's Literature in Traditional Arab Schools for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract**

This research has shown that the use of authentic children's literature is an effective and motivating *ESL* classroom strategy. However, this study investigated the use of children's stories in *EFL* elementary classrooms where the teaching methods are very traditional and the resources are limited. This study was carried out in an elementary school in an Arab town in Israel. Approximately a hundred fifth and sixth grade pupils filled in a questionnaire expressing their attitudes towards being taught through stories. Teacher trainees taught the classes, wrote reflections, filled in questionnaires and were observed by the researchers. This information has been collected and served as the data for the study. Results suggest that the use of this strategy is very positive and should be carefully considered by EFL teachers, EFL trainees and teacher educators.

**Keywords:** Children's stories, EFL teacher trainees, EFL pupils, Traditional classrooms

## 1. Introduction

Many theories have been developed by linguists, psychologists and researchers to explain the process of language acquisition. A variety of empirical and experimental studies were conducted based on certain theoretical assumptions. Researchers find similarities and differences in first and second language acquisition. However, 'the similarities overweigh the differences' (Ellis, 1985, 9). Halliday (1978**)** adds that many writers in the applied linguistics field have emphasized similarities between first and second language learning rather than differences. Teaching English as a first language through authentic children's literature has been used for teaching English as a first language in many English speaking countries such as New Zealand, England, Canada and the United States. Integrating authentic children's literature either wholly or partially became a reality in teaching English as a second language. ESL instruction through authentic children's stories highlights the importance of communicative, authentic, meaningful and purposeful texts for reading and writing (Hannabuss, 2002; Smallwood, 1992; Freeman & Freeman, 1989; Zemelman & Daniels, 1988;).

Arabic is diglossic with a colloquial spoken form and a more formal written classical Arabic. Many pupils reach school in the first grade with minimum knowledge of the classical language (Amara & Mari', 2002). Hebrew is introduced in the second grade, and English is taught mainly orally in the third grade. When English reading and writing are introduced in the fourth grade, these young pupils are grappling with three different scripts: Arabic, Hebrew and English. Furthermore, due to the peculiarities of each of these three languages, bottom up decoding very often does not result in accurate reading of the word.

Naturally, children as well as adults are drawn to stories. It is also argued that stories are "the fundamental grammar of all thought and communication" in every language (Chambers, 1985). In addition, children's literature 'presents a veritable treasure for teaching both content and language skills' (Cockman, 2004, 172). According to Shrestha (2008), children's stories are a good authentic source of language for developing their literacy skills as well ask their emotional development. She concludes stating that 'stories are a wonderful vehicle in order to provide a natural linguistic environment in an unnatural one such as a classroom' (281). Seung-Yoeun & Sook Hee (2006) reports about a successful movement called 'Mother Brand English' in South Korea, where mothers expose their infants and little children to the English language and culture using English authentic stories besides other audio and videotaped materials. She claims that that these young children enjoy valuable children literature and develop their English in a meaningful authentic way. According to Ghosn (2002) a syllabus that is based on authentic stories provides a motivating medium for language learning. Teachers are expected to read to their students or tell them stories every day as an important part of the curriculum.

Some studies had been conducted to examine the effectiveness of teaching through authentic children's stories in second language classrooms (Elly 1991, Freeman & Freeman 1996; Freeman & Freeman, 1992;; MacGowan-Gilhooly, 1991). For example, Elley (1991) writes about four studies comparing language development of children who learned a first language in traditional classrooms and those who participated in a book-based program in New Zealand. Results showed superior performance by participants in the book-based program in the three administered to examine its effectiveness. The participants in the book-based program outperformed their peers who learned in traditional classrooms. Moreover, Elley and Mangubhai (1983) report that in second language classrooms "pupils exposed to many stories progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate and confirmed the hypothesis that high interest story reading has an important role to play in second language reading" (p.53).

Similarly, MacGowan-Gilhooly (1991) reports about a literature based program for teaching ESL at the college level in New York College where students were exposed to a massive amount of reading, approximately, 70 pages a day. They were also expected to write their reflections and to answer questions about the readings. MacGowan emphasizes the positive results for pursuing such a program indicating the significant gains in language proficiency among the ESL learners. In addition, the students enthusiastically fulfilled the requirements of the course. These research studies had been conducted at the elementary level and the college level as well.

In light of the positive findings of these ESL research studies, we conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of children's stories for teaching English as a foreign language in traditional classrooms. Traditional classrooms are not usually equipped with a rich environment of print that includes fiction and nonfiction books, magazines, newspapers, signs, calendars…etc. In fact, they are "talk and chalk" classrooms which lack most of the updated equipment and technology for effective language learning.

In general, English is taught traditionally. There could be many reasons for this. One might be the lack of resources and facilities; another might be the lack of exposure to the English language and its speakers. (Amara & Mari', 2002; Abu Rass, 1991) The problem is further manifested in the shortage of well-qualified English teachers in some schools in the Arabic sector. Abu Rass (1991) adds that teaching English as a Foreign Language in these conditions places a heavy burden and pressure on Arab learners.

The student teachers in this study are in their third year of studies in The Academic Institute for Teaching and Teacher Education which is part of Beit Berl College, a teacher education college in Israel. It has a four year program for training students to become qualified English teachers from grade four through nine. At the end of the fourth year, the students get their Bachelors of Education degree. The curriculum consists of four main areas: proficiency [oral and written], literature, linguistics and pedagogy. These students practice their teaching in local Arab schools, and they are encouraged to employ innovative ideas for teaching English as a foreign language by integrating children's literature and authentic stories in particular. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine the appropriateness of integrating authentic children's literature in foreign language classrooms in terms of students' attitudes and interaction in Arab elementary schools in Israel. English is taught in these schools as a fourth language. To examine the effectiveness of this way of teaching in terms of student teachers' as well as the pupils' attitudes in this particular situation, the following four research questions have been asked.

1) Could the idea of teaching through stories be applicable to traditional Arab classrooms for English as a foreign language?

2) How does teaching through stories affect the attitudes of the trainees?

3) How does teaching through stories affect the attitudes of the pupils at school?

4) What are the obstacles of applying this strategy in these classrooms?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Subjects

The subjects of the research are third year student teachers in the English Department in the Academic Arab Institute for Teacher Training at Beit Berl College. In the second year, a course of teaching English through children's stories is offered. This is in conjunction with the first domain of the new national curriculum for teaching English in Israel which is 'Appreciation of literature and culture'. In this course, students are exposed to a variety of children's books and their relevance to English language classrooms. As part of evaluation, the second year students usually prepare lesson plans for teaching English through stories and present them orally in class. In the third year, they are expected to put their preparation into practice in their practical work in the schools twice a week. One day is spent in the elementary schools and the other in junior high schools. The trainees were expected to teach through authentic stories in the elementary level.

During the time of the study, they were taking the Didactic Seminar, a three-hour course that links theoretical and practical issues in teaching English as a foreign language. The practical work in carried out at two levels: elementary

and junior high to put theory into practice. The course of Children's Literature is designed specifically for teaching EFL through stories in the elementary schools. Also serving as subjects were two groups of fifth and sixth graders who learned in an elementary school in adjacent town to the college, which is a middle-sized town in the central part of Israel and located 13 miles north east of Tel Aviv.

The elementary school has eighteen classes, from first through sixth, with three classes for each grade level. This helped us gather information about the effect that teaching through stories had on the pupils. The total number of the pupils is one hundred and eight. The forty nine fifth graders were taught through stories almost every week by two student teachers who were expected to do so as part of their practical work requirements. The two trainees' instruction to the fifty nine sixth graders included stories only occasionally.

The student teachers were placed to practice teaching in an elementary school in an adjacent Arab town to the Academic College Beit Berl. They were required to integrate authentic English children' stories in their instruction and to observe each other actual teaching in the classrooms. They were supervised by their pedagogical adviser who taught them the theoretical course and was one of the two researchers. The lesson plans were discussed with her in advance.

*2.2 Research instrument*

Qualitative methods were employed in this research to provide a genuine picture of the use of stories for teaching English as a foreign language in traditional Arab classrooms. Qualitative data collection involved class observations, informal talks with the trainees and the master teachers, trainees' observation notes as well as ours and the students' general reflections. These general reflections were part of the two practical work portfolios, which were submitted twice a year. In addition, quantitative data collection included two questionnaires which were administered at the end of the school year. The first questionnaire included closed questions about the trainees' attitudes, objectives, and understanding towards EFL instruction through children's stories. One open question asked the trainees to write about their experience of teaching the elementary level through children's literature. In addition, they were expected to express their opinions about its success or failure and the reason behind it.

The second questionnaire was administered to the pupils in the 5$^{th}$ and 6$^{th}$ grades in the elementary school, where the student teachers practiced their teaching. It included 19 closed questions and two open ones. The closed questions asked about their attitudes in general towards the English lesson, their interest and participation, learning through stories, the amount of exposure to English language through cartoons, and reading stories in general. The two open questions focused specifically on the lessons of the trainee and the methods used in her instruction.

Videotaping took place in three lessons throughout the school year to examine the effectiveness of teaching EFL through stories in terms of pupils' motivation, participation and discipline. Student teachers were observed in the four elementary schools where they practiced teaching. However, the focus was on two student teachers who were practicing their teaching in the elementary school in a nearby town to the college. They were observed by the pedagogical adviser, one of the researchers, eight times. The other researcher observed them four times.

The answers of the closes questions in the questionnaire of the pupils were coded and analyzed statistically [N=112]. Since the number of the trainees who answered the questions in the questionnaire is fourteen (out of eighteen); no statistical analysis has done. The answers of the eight questions were counted by hand.

For data analysis, the answers of the two open questions in the questionnaires of the pupils were categorized. Five categories were decided for each question. The categories which were created were as follows: For the question: "I like the lesson of the students teacher because…" the categories were: [mentions] stories, [mentions] activities and methods, [mentions] inter-personal reasons, [mentions] clarity of teaching and content. Similarly, the answers of the second question, which sought their opinion about the method, fell into five categories: [mentions] visual aids and materials, [gives a judgment, i.e. good] evaluative, [mentions] inter-personal reasons, [mentions] reading and writing and [the catch-all category] other.

The trainees were asked: "How do you find the experience of teaching English through authentic children's books?" "Is it successful? Please explain your answer". The answers were divided into four categories: motivation; enjoyment and fun; attention and language learning. The general reflections had similar categories. In addition, the students' and our observation notes were categorized accordingly. The videotape was edited to demonstrate the same categories.

## 3. Results and discussion

*3.1 Student teachers' and pupils' attitudes*

Searching for the answers of the four specific questions was the basis for our data analysis. In order to organize the analysis, we looked at the questionnaire results, our and the students' class observation notes, the two copies of the students' general reflections, the answers of the open questions, the class materials and the videotapes.

Generally speaking, the trainees as well as the pupils expressed very positive opinions about teaching EFL through authentic children's stories.

Table 1 was meant generally to evaluate their attitude at the end of the school year. The questionnaires had some general questions (A & B), some questions specific to teaching literature in the classroom (C, D, & H) and some questions on the reading habits and beliefs of the trainees (E,F,& G).

Insert table 1 here.

In general, the trainees were positive about their elementary school teaching experience. The answers to questions C & D gave an accurate picture of the potential and the problems of using authentic literature in such traditional classrooms. In both cases the answer "sometimes" suggests that although the student teachers recognized that this is an excellent method of teaching, they realize that it cannot be the entire program. The difficulties stem from the fact that that teaching through literature is not part of the core curriculum and the physical setting in Arab schools is an obstacle by itself. The trainees have to purchase the books by themselves as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and the schools do not have collections of books.

In the trainees' first reflection which was included in the first portfolio, they were expected to reflect on their practical work in general. No specific question was asked. Nine out of the eighteen students mentioned that they enjoyed teaching through stories and the pupils had fun as well.

The master teachers had repeatedly expressed their appreciation of trainees' use of authentic stories to teach EFL at the elementary level. Some of them even asked to copy the stories and the activities. The pupils at school greatly appreciated the use of stories, the abundance of visual aids; they loved listening to songs and stories and participating in the wide range of activities. For example, a considerable number of the fifth grade pupils, who were taught through stories almost once a week, mentioned that they like the trainees' lessons because of the stories. The answers of the two open questions also show that the pupils appreciated the trainees' methods and activities, especially among the sixth graders. In the closed question questionnaire (Table 2), the pupils were asked about their general attitudes about English lessons (A & B), their participation in the English lesson (G-H), the experience of learning through stories (H-N), their outside class exposure to English (O & P) and their literacy habits in general (Q-S). The table represents the combined results of two 5th grade classes which were taught with stories and two 6th grade classes which were not taught using this method.

It can be seen that more than 70% of the participants expressed positive attitudes toward the English lessons and their participation in those lessons. Reading literature in the classroom represents a departure from their usual textbook activities. Such a lesson demands that the children listen to a story and participate in activities that are very different from traditional "chalk and talk" lessons. Nevertheless, more than 60% of the pupils indicated that they liked the English lesson when the teacher reads a story (combined *Very often* & *often* responses). It should be noted that over 75% like when the teacher reads from the textbook (combined *Very often* & *often* responses)

Approximately 65% do understand the story when the teacher reads. These pupils in general do not hear English outside the classroom and having a story read to them even in L1 (question R & S) is not a common activity. However, the interest and motivation that the story creates makes up for the deficit in language.

To answer the four research questions, we looked at the statistical results of the questionnaires, the open questions, the general reflections of the trainees, observation notes and the videotapes. All sources of data indicate that children's literature could be part of the Arab classrooms instruction of EFL. The answers of the three questions which asked about the pupils' liking and understanding to stories and coloring as an activity show very positive results.

The trainees also wrote positively in their reflections about teaching English through stories. The following three citations are one reflection and two answers of the open question. In fact, they reflect the very positive experience the trainees had in their instruction through stories in the elementary level.

*Teaching through stories was another lovely experience. Pupils enjoyed hearing a story and all their attention was focused at me. I felt that they learn better and that they were motivated. The subject matter was meaningful and they remembered the material for a long time.*

*It is of course a successful method. I like it and I enjoy it. I think that students benefit a lot from it since they like it. When I enter the class, the students gather around me asking me to read them a story. It is a very good method to control the class since students become very quiet while reading.*

*I think such method can be sometimes very beneficial and effective. This due to the real atmosphere it creates and establishes. I mean in this way children may learn spontaneously without being aware they're doing so.*

Although most of the answers show the positive attitude of the trainees towards teaching through children's literature, one student was not particularly excited about it. She attributed her neutral attitude to the story itself which could be motivating or not. The following is her answer for the open question.

*I think it depends on the story and the class. It sometimes works and the children learn things the teacher explains, and sometimes they don't.*

In contrast, one student was not positive at all in all of her answers and reflections. She mentioned repeatedly that it was a very hard experience since the stories are appropriate to native speakers and not to non-native ones. In addition, teaching through stories is very demanding in terms of preparation of materials and activities.

The videotapes also show that the students as well as their teacher enjoyed the lesson. The enjoyment was manifested in their full attention to the teacher, their attempt of guessing what comes after and their eagerness to participate in the activities. Besides the above mentioned areas, the videotapes overlap with the content of some of the reflections which stated very positive comments about teaching through authentic stories in terms of language use. The pupils used English to answer the teacher's questions.

Regarding the fourth question, our research didn't find any major obstacles in the application of these strategies in the classroom. The previously mentioned comment by the one of the trainees about the extra preparation involved in using this method is certainly a factor; however, we feel that the positive benefits are worth the efforts.

A variety of print to include not only stories, but also poetry, songs, rhymes, riddles, jokes and other authentic texts is a must. In addition, better results would be achieved if in-service teachers attend special training workshops and courses for integrating authentic literature in their instruction of EFL. Moreover, parents should be involved in this change since most of them should have finished high school at least and are aware of the importance of English for the success of their children. For example, they could also attend special workshops that illustrate the significance and the importance of teaching EFL through children's literature especially at the elementary level. The training session should focus on the criteria for choosing a book, the way it should be read to their kids and how to discuss its content. Such training sessions are very important because only 11.6% of the pupils mentioned that their parents always read them books. (L1). Similarly, 7.1% mentioned that they have this parental experience only sometimes (See Table 2). 16.1% of the pupils answered positively to the question which asked them if they read a story before they go to bed and 9.8% stated that they do so sometimes.

The results of this study have shown that authentic children's stories are motivating sources of EFL materials. Most of the studies had been carried out in the use of authentic stories were conducted in 2nd language classrooms schools in which the language instruction was English or in second language classrooms in English speaking countries. This study indicates that authentic stories can be an outstanding strategy in EFL class rooms as well. Therefore, they should be considered seriously for being part of the school curriculum in EFL classrooms. A great deal of communicative activities to include all language skills could be prepared to facilitate language learning through reading holistic authentic stories.

## 4. Conclusion

The above analysis indicates that authentic children's stories could be very motivating, enjoyable and a very effective source for foreign language learning. It also indicates the applicability of integrating authentic stories in the EFL instruction in traditional Arab classrooms. Using such stories will be just a pleasant diversion unless serious steps are taken first. Well-stocked libraries for every day reading are needed.

The results of this study show that using children's stories in EFL classrooms could be a very motivating and encouraging tool for achieving a positive attitude among the learners as well as their instructors. In addition, it could be used as a stimulus for increasing the learners' participation in EFL classroom language learning activities.

There is no doubt that there is still a great deal to be learned about use of children's literature in the EFL classrooms. This study was flawed in that although the two groups of the fifth and sixth graders didn't have equal instruction of English through stories, the data from the questionnaires were analyzed collectively. The analysis would have been more useful if the results had been compared rather than collated.

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Table 1. Third year students' questionnaire N= 14

| | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Not at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. I like teaching English to elementary school children | 10 | 4 | - | - |
| B. I prepare myself well for my lessons. | 11 | 3 | - | - |
| C. I teach through authentic children's literature | 3 | 9 | 2 | - |
| D. I am very excited about implementing the ideas that I learned in the "Whole Language" Course | 3 | 9 | 2 | - |
| E. I like reading literature in general. | 9 | 5 | - | - |
| F. I enjoy reading children's literature to my siblings, nephews and nieces | 4 | 6 | - | - |
| G. I don't think that reading is useful. | 1 | - | 2 | 11 |
| H. I don't believe that teaching through literature is beneficial for teaching EFL. | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 |

Table 2. Pupils' Questionnaire  N=112

|  | Very often | Often | Someti mes | Rarely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I like the English lesson | 55.4 | 25.0 | 14.3 | 5.4 |
| b. I take part in the English lesson | 41.4 | 30.4 | 25.0 | 3.6 |
| c. I raise my hand when I am sure that my answer is correct | 59.8 | 14.3 | 20.5 | 1.8 |
| d. I try to answer the teacher's questions | 49.1 | 32.2 | 15.2 | 2.7 |
| e. I prepare for the English lesson | 64.3 | 24.1 | 7.1 | - |
| f. I usually do my homework for the English lesson. | 68.8 | 14.3 | 13.4 | .9 |
| g. I ask my mom/brother to help me. | 8.9 | 8.0 | 46.4 | 35.7 |
| h. I feel a difficulty in the English lesson | 8.0 | 8.0 | 47.3 | 32.1 |
| i. I like the lesson when the teacher reads us a story | 35.7 | 28.6 | 25.9 | 8.0 |
| j. I like the lesson when the teacher reads from the textbook | 44.6 | 32.1 | 16.1 | 15.4 |
| k. I like the lesson when the teacher doesn't teach us from the book. | 7.1 | 15.2 | 40.2 | 34.8 |
| l. I understand the story that the student teacher reads. | 39.3 | 26.8 | 24.1 | 6.3 |
| m. I feel it is hard to understand the story | 8.0 | 10.7 | 38.4 | 40.2 |
| n. I like to color in the booklet that the student teacher gives. | 44.6 | 13.4 | 26.8 | 13.4 |
| o. I watch cartoons in English | 42.00 | 20.5 | 25.9 | 11.6 |
| p. I like to play computer games in English | 28.6 | 27.7 | 30.4 | 12.5 |
| q. I like reading stories in general | 50.0 | 19.6 | 22.3 | 4.5 |
| r. My parents read me stories before I go to bed. | 11.6 | 7.1 | 25.0 | 56.3 |
| s. I read stories before I go to bed. | 16.1 | 9.8 | 32.1 | 41.1 |

# Vocabulary Knowledge of Adult ESL Learners

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**Abstract**

This study assessed Malaysian tertiary students' levels of passive and controlled active vocabulary knowledge. Two tests from the Vocabulary Levels Test were used to collect the data namely the Passive Vocabulary Test and Controlled Active Vocabulary Test. When using the test, the researchers were not particularly interested in the students' total score on the tests, but were interested more in whether the students knew enough of the high-frequency words. 360 first- and second-year university students from five diploma programs were involved in the study. The findings revealed that majority of them did not have enough vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary size to use English as their second language though formal exposure to the language had been given to them for more than 12 years. This paper, besides discussing the students' levels of passive and controlled active vocabulary knowledge and their vocabulary size, highlights the vocabulary levels and vocabulary size they should attain. The probable impact vocabulary knowledge has on the acquisition of other English language skills is another area discussed. Some recommendations for teaching approaches are also put forward.

**Keywords:** Passive Vocabulary Knowledge, Controlled Active Vocabulary Knowledge, Vocabulary Size

## 1. Introduction

According to Diamond and Gutlohn (2006), vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world", describes Stahl (2005). Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. In learning English language, lexis or vocabulary is recognized as a vital factor for ESL or EFL literary development (Coxhead, 2006; Horst et al., 2005; Lee & Munice, 2006). That is, L2 learners' lexical knowledge may determine the quality of their listening, speaking, reading, and writing performances.

Nevertheless, the nature of lexical knowledge, that is the question of what it actually means for a language learner to "know" a word, lies at the very heart of L2 vocabulary acquisition. As Laufer and Paribakht (1998, p. 366) observe, "no clear and unequivocal consensus exists as to the nature of lexical knowledge", apart from the general agreement that it should be construed as some sort of continuum of several levels or dimensions rather than an all-or-nothing phenomenon.

Vocabulary researchers normally differentiate between passive (receptive) and active (productive) vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 2001). Having passive vocabulary knowledge enables one to perceive the form of the word and retrieve its meaning(s). Active vocabulary knowledge, on the other hand, enables one to retrieve the appropriate spoken or written word form of the meaning one wants to express (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004).

In other words, vocabulary knowledge can be viewed from quantitative and qualitative angles. Many people believe that knowing a word means knowing its meaning- breadth of knowledge. Nation and Waring (1997, p. 6) described quantitative vocabulary knowledge as being concerned with the question "How much vocabulary does a second language learner need?" However, Cook (2001) states that "a word is more than its meaning" (p. 61). For Cook, knowing a word involves four aspects: (1) form of the word such as pronunciation and spelling, (2) grammatical properties such as grammatical categories of the word, (3) lexical properties such as word combinations and appropriateness, and (4) meaning- the general and specific meaning. Clearly, "knowing a word requires more than just familiarity with its meaning and form" (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997, p. 4).

Thus, the notions of Receptive (Passive) and Productive (Active) Vocabulary (RPV) are normally discussed in four different ways. First, RPV processes refer to subconscious mental processes involved in the recognition, recall, retrieval, comprehension, and production of lexical items. Second, the RPV abilities involve the control of what is received and what is produced. Third, RPV skills denote the receptive skills of listening and reading from the productive skills of speaking and writing. Finally, the RPV product is represented by the RPV sizes and what we know about one's own RPV knowledge as viewed through language tasks (Waring, 1999). As a rule of thumb, the receptive vocabulary is at least twice the size of the productive vocabulary.

The study, therefore, addresses the following research objective that is to determine the students' levels of passive and controlled active vocabulary knowledge. This paper, on the other hand, discusses several issues based on the findings namely the levels of vocabulary knowledge that Malaysian university students should attain, their chances of reaching native-like vocabulary size, and the influence vocabulary knowledge has on the acquisition of reading and writing skills besides suggesting some pedagogical approaches.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

There are 5413 diploma students at Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis and according to Wunsch (1986), for a group of 5413 students, at least a sample of 346 are needed to make an estimation with a sampling error of $\pm$ 5 percent at 95 percent confidence level. Nevertheless, 360 students are chosen. Out of the 360 students, 126 students were from Semester 1, 102 from Semester 2, and Semester 3 comprised of 132 students.

### 2.2 Vocabulary Levels Test

The Vocabulary Levels Test which consists of three different vocabulary tests is used to measure the three dimensions of the respondents' English vocabulary knowledge. The three different vocabulary tests are:

1) The Passive Vocabulary Test for passive vocabulary size (Nation, 1990);

2) The Controlled Active Vocabulary Test for controlled active vocabulary size (Laufer & Nation, 1995);

3) The Free Active Vocabulary Test for lexical richness in free written expression (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

However, for the purpose of this study only the first two tests are used. The Passive Vocabulary Test measures passive vocabulary knowledge and is originally based on words from five word-frequency levels namely the first 2,000 words, 3,000 words, 5,000 words, the University word level (beyond 5,000 words) and 10,000 words. However, in this study only the first four levels are used. Each level is intended to relate to specific vocabulary learning objectives. According to Nation (1990), the 2,000- and 3,000-word levels contain the high-frequency words that all learners need to know in order

to function effectively in English. The 5,000-word level represents the upper limit of general high-frequency vocabulary that is worth spending time on in class. Finally, words at the University level should help students in reading their textbooks and other academic reading material.

The Passive Vocabulary Test involves word-definition matching although, in a reversal of the standard practice, the respondents are required to match the words to the definitions. Each frequency level of the test comprises six sections and each section includes 6 words and 3 definitions. In other words, there are 36 words and 18 definitions at each level. Although there are only 18 words at each level, Nation (1990) argues that 36 words are tested because the respondents need to check every word against the definitions in order to make the correct matches. Words in each level of the test are representative of all the words at that level. In fact, the test is designed to be sensitive to any vocabulary knowledge held by the students. Therefore, each word in the test is distinctly different within each set of words being tested.

The words for each level are also selected on a random basis but with proper nouns and compound nouns are excluded so that the results of the test would give a reasonable indication of what proportion of the total number of words at each frequency level the students have some knowledge of. In addition, all the words in each group belong to the same word class in order to avoid giving any grammatical clue as to the correct definition. On the other hand, apart from the correct matches, care is taken not to group together words definitions that are related in meaning. The test is intended as a broad measure of word knowledge, without the students to distinguish between semantically related words.

The Passive Vocabulary Test has 72 items (18 in each level). It tests the target words out of context because context might provide clues to their meanings. The researchers are only interested in the number of words the students could understand without any clues, rather than their guessing ability. The answers are scored as correct or incorrect. Each correct answer was given one point. Since the test had 72 items, the maximum score was therefore 72. "A weak score at any level is defined as knowing fewer than 15 out of 18 items, or less than 83%" according to Nation's experience using the test (Nation, 1990, pg. 140).

The Controlled Active Vocabulary Test is modeled on the Passive Vocabulary Test, in which it uses the same frequency bands and the same items. It elicits target items from four frequency levels in short sentences with the items' first few letters provided in order to eliminate other possibilities. The students are to provide the missing word in each sentence. The test has 72 items- 18 in each level. The scoring is in terms of correct (1 point) or incorrect/ blank (0 point). An item is considered correct when it is semantically correct- the appropriate word is used to express the intended meaning. If used in the wrong grammatical form, it is not marked as incorrect. A word with a spelling error which does not distort the word is not marked as incorrect either. Most of the incorrect answers are non-words or existing words which are incorrect in the provided context. As in the test of passive vocabulary size, the maximum score is 72. "A weak score at any level is defined as knowing fewer than 15 out of 18 items, or less than 83%", according to Nation's experience using the test (Nation, 1990, pg. 140).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Respondents' levels of passive vocabulary knowledge

The Passive Vocabulary Test which has four word-frequency levels namely the first 2000 words, 3000 words, University Word List (UWL), and 5000 words is used to evaluate the students' passive vocabulary knowledge. A weak score at any level is defined as knowing fewer than 15 out of 18 items, or less than 83% according to Nation's (1990, p. 140) experience using the test.

At the 2000 word level, 120 Semester One students, 93 Semester Two students and 111 Semester Three students are in the weak group. For the 3000 word level, 121 Semester One students, 92 Semester Two and 102 Semester Three students are categorized as weak. Then, 125 Semester One, 99 Semester Two and 121 Semester Three students are in the weak group for the UWL. Finally, none of the Semester One students manages to pass the test at the 5000 Word Level; only one Semester Two and six Semester Three students pass. Those results suggest that majority of the students have weak English passive vocabulary knowledge.

The main scores obtained by Semester One, Semester Two, and Semester Three students in the Passive Vocabulary Test are 33.01, 35.72, and 42.57 respectively. In terms of vocabulary size, the mean scores represent 1528, 1653, and 1968 word families. Comparing the passive vocabulary size of Semester 1, Semester 2, and Semester 3 students, it could be seen that it increases from 1528 to 1653 to 1968 word families in three semesters. In other words, the increase is 440 word families per year.

### 3.2 Respondents' levels of controlled active vocabulary knowledge

The Controlled Active Vocabulary Test is modeled on the Passive Vocabulary Test. It elicits target items from four frequency word levels in short sentences with the items' first few letters provided in order to eliminate other possibilities. The students provide the missing word in each sentence. A weak score at any level is also defined as knowing fewer than 15 out of 18 items, or less than 83% according to Nation's (1990, pg. 140) experience using the test.

At the 2000 word level, 97 Semester One students are categorized as weak as compared to 62 for Semester Two and 70 Semester Three. As for the 3000 word level, only two Semester One students are not in the weak category. However, Semester Two and Three students have seven and 17 students respectively. Moving to the University Word List (UWL), 120 Semester One, 87 Semester Two, and 115 Semester Three students fail to get the minimum scores of 15 correct answers out of 18 which made them eligible to be put in the good group. Finally, results in the 5000 word level indicate that more students fail the test- 118 Semester One students fail followed by 87 Semester Two and 115 Semester Three. Those results suggest that majority of the respondents are still weak in terms of their English controlled active vocabulary knowledge.

The mean scores obtained by Semester One, Semester Two, and Semester Three students in the Controlled Active Vocabulary Test are 36.53, 45.71, and 46.53 respectively. In terms of vocabulary size the mean scores represent 1691, 2116, and 2154 word families. Comparing the controlled active vocabulary size of Semester 1, Semester 2, and Semester 3 students, it could be seen that the vocabulary size increased from 1695 to 2116 to 2154 word families. In other words, within two semesters the increase was 459 word families.

## 4. Discussion

Since the findings clearly show that majority of Malaysian university students fail to achieve the passing level of the Passive and Controlled Active Vocabulary Test, a conclusion could be made that they have poor passive and active vocabulary knowledge. The situation is quite alarming because the students before entering university have at least formally been exposed to English language in schools for at least 13 years. There are two questions needed to be answered to evaluate the seriousness of the problem. The questions are (1) What are the levels of vocabulary knowledge that Malaysian university students should attain? (2) Can Malaysian university students acquire a vocabulary size comparable to that of native speakers?

Pondering on several studies on word levels would answer the first question. Based on a research conducted by Francis and Kucera (1982), with vocabulary knowledge of the first 2000 word level, a learner will know almost 80 per cent of the words in a text. However, Liu and Nation (1985) disagree. They claim that such percentage is not sufficient to successfully guess the meanings of unknown words and they are supported by Laufer (1988); 95 per cent coverage or higher is proposed.

To verify the above argument, a few studies on vocabulary size should be quoted. Laufer (1989) in her study focused on what percentage of running words need to be understood to ensure 'reasonable' reading comprehension of a text. She finds that those who score 95% and above on the vocabulary measure have a significantly higher number of successful readers than those scoring below 95%. Laufer (1992) carry out the study further by looking at the relationship between reading composition score and vocabulary size. Finding shows that the minimal vocabulary level where there are more readers than non-readers is 3000 word families. In addition, Hirsh and Nation (1992) study novels written for teenage readers. Findings conclude that a vocabulary size of 2000 to 3000 words provides a coverage up to 97% of the words in those novels. Thus, a vocabulary size of 2000 to 3000 words is necessary to comprehend those novels. Furthermore, Hu and Nation (1995) compare the effect of four text coverages on a reading comprehension of a fiction text. At the 95% coverage level, some readers gain adequate comprehension but most do not. At the 90% coverage level a smaller number gains adequate comprehension, and at the 80% level, none does. Hu and Nation thus conclude that teenage readers basically need to know around 98% of the running words in the text to enjoy a pleasure reading.

All the findings in the above studies zoom in to the conclusion that vocabulary acquisition beyond the 2000 word level is needed to provide a basis for comprehension in any English text and there is no compromise on that.

As for the second question, comparing vocabulary size of native and non-native speakers would be a good move. A study by Zechmeister et al. (1995) indicates that the receptive vocabulary size of a college-educated native English speaker is about 17,000 word families. A word family consists of a headword, its inflected forms, and its closely related derived forms (Nation, 2001). Nation and Waring (1997) estimate that the receptive vocabulary size of a university-educated native English speaker is around 20,000 base words while Goulden, Nation, and Read's (1990) study indicates that the receptive vocabulary size range of university-educated native English speakers is between 13,200 to 20,700 base words with an average of 17,200 base words.

Based on the above studies, approximately 17,000 word families should then be the vocabulary size of university-educated non-native English speakers. The target of 17,000 word families for university-educated non-native English speakers is achievable according to several studies. Since Cervatiuc's (2007) study, for instance, indicates that the average receptive vocabulary size of highly proficient university-educated non-native English speakers ranges between 13,500 and 20,000 base words, the finding is comparable to university-educated native English speakers' vocabulary size which is around 17,000 word families.

Goulden, Nation, and Read (1990) are also optimistic with the 17,000 word- family target. The quotation below indicates their stance:

Clearly, estimates of vocabulary size of adult native speakers which credit them with vocabularies of 216,000 words (Diller, 1978) or 80,000 words (Miller & Gilden, 1987) are greatly inflated. It is more likely that the average educated native speaker has a vocabulary of around 17,000 base words and has acquired them at the average rate of about two or three words per day. If native speakers do in fact acquire vocabulary at this relatively slow rate, it would seem that for second language learners, direct teaching and learning of vocabulary is a feasible proposition.

(Goulden, Nation, & Read, 1990, p. 356)

A longitudinal study by Milton and Meara (1995) also views the 17,000 word-family target for university-educated non-native English speakers positively. The study involves 53 European exchange students who are majoring in management science and some in English language and literature teaching. Finding indicates that adult learners of English as a second language could learn 2650 base words per year. A vocabulary acquisition rate of 2650 base words per year would allow adult learners of English as a second language to achieve a native-like vocabulary size of 17,200 base words in 6.49 years.

Though the studies produce positive findings towards the 17,000 word-family target for adult non-native speakers, several factors which might lead to such a scenario should be considered. Cervatiuc's (2007) study was conducted in Canada, an English speaking country, and the 20 participants were immigrant who had resided in Canada for an average of 11.55 years. Goulden, Nation, and Read's (1990) study involved only native speakers and was also conducted in an English speaking country. In Milton and Meara's (1995) study, the rate of 2650 base words per year may not be applicable to average ESL learners since the participants in the study were top and exceptional learners.

Nevertheless, the 360 participants in this study may not be able to accomplish the 17,000 word-family target due to several reasons. First of all, the 360 participants are residing in Malaysia, a non-English speaking country, so there is a very limited English environment for them. English is normally learned just as a subject in their university. Secondly, the 360 participants are not top or exceptional ESL learners. Their command of English is average or below average so their rate of vocabulary learning is expected to be slower. Finally, the present vocabulary size reveals the whole story. Presently, their receptive vocabulary grows at 440 word families per year so they might take 39.09 years to achieve the 17,200 word-family target. On the other hand, they might take 37.47 years for controlled active vocabulary knowledge based on present growth of 459 word families per year.

## 5. Conclusion

Having limited vocabulary may expose Malaysian university students to several obstacles. The first obstacle is in terms of overall academic success (Baumann, Kame'enui & Ash, 2003). Academic success is closely related to the ability to read and this relationship seems logical because to get meaning from what they read, these students need to have a big number of words in their memory. Students who do not have large vocabularies often struggle to achieve comprehension. This bad reading experience will create a feeling of frustration which might continue throughout their studies (Snow et al., 2000; Hart & Risley, 2003). As a result, normally these students will avoid reading. Because they do not read very much, the opportunity to see and learn many new words becomes slimmer which automatically produces the well-known "Matthew Effects", Stanovich's (1986) application of Matthew, 25: 29- "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In terms of vocabulary development, good readers read more, become better readers, and learn more words; poor readers read less, become poorer readers, and learn few words.

Besides affecting reading ability which is obviously known to everyone, limited vocabulary knowledge may also influence their writing quality which is important to their future. The following studies show the relationship between vocabulary size and writing ability. Linnarud (1986) analyzes compositions written in Swedish by native and non-native speakers of Swedish. She correlates the compositions in terms of total number of words for each composition, a number of words per sentence, lexical individuality, and lexical sophistication. She concludes that vocabulary size is the single largest factor in writing quality. Next, Astika (1993) uses a scoring technique similar to the ESL Composition Profile which analyzes content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics, to score 210 writing samples. A multiple regression analysis reveals that 84% of the variance could be accounted for by vocabulary. Similarly, Laufer and Nation (1995) use *VocabProfile* to produce a Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP) of 65 student compositions. The aim of the study is to determine to what extend such a profile would correlate with the students' scores on the Passive Vocabulary Levels Test (PVLT). They find that students who have larger vocabularies use fewer high frequency words and more low frequency words than students with smaller vocabularies. Ahmad (2009) did obtain the same results in his study which involved 360 Malaysian university students. In addition, Beglar and Hunt (1999) compared the TOEFL Structure and Written Expression subsection with two of the four versions of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT), version A and B, and finds that the correlations are .61 and .65 respectively. The results are just slightly lower than the correlations found with reading comprehension.

## 6. Recommendations

Since the findings show that adult ESL learners have poor vocabulary knowledge, an effective vocabulary program should be introduced. To be effective, a program of vocabulary instruction should provide them with opportunities for word learning by:

*i) encouraging wide reading*

Since ESL learners usually learn new words by encountering them in text, the volume of their reading is strongly related to their vocabulary knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991). Increasing the opportunities for such encounters means improving their vocabulary, which, in turn, enhances their ability to read more and more complex text. Thus, the single most important thing which could be done to improve their vocabulary is to get them to read more. Although the probability of learning any particular word from context is not big, the cumulative effects of learning from reading can be large (Herman et. al, 1987).

What kinds of reading are necessary to encourage vocabulary growth? Some argue that almost any reading is beneficial to ESL learners but others say that if they consistently select texts below their current reading levels, even wide reading will not help vocabulary growth (Carver & Leibert, 1995). Nor is reading text full of unfamiliar words likely to produce large gains in word knowledge (Shefelbine, 1990). To help ESL learners get the most out of reading, they should be encouraged to read at a variety of levels such as easy texts simply for enjoyment to increase their reading fluency and some texts that challenge them.

Increasing the students' motivation to read is another crucial factor in helping them to obtain the maximum benefits from their wide reading. A powerful motivating factor associated with more reading is a conducive classroom environment; a conducive classroom environment should encourage and promote social interactions related to reading (Guthrie et. al, 1995). Making available a variety of books and setting aside ample time for reading can also motivate reading. Other suggestions could be recommending or providing lists of books for students to read outside of class and modeling the value of reading by telling the students about the books you are reading. Furthermore, helping them to develop reading strategies is another useful way. This will allow them to read more challenging texts with lower levels of frustration. When they have developed such strategies they tend to do more reading (Guthrie et. al, 1995).

Nevertheless, similar to other methods, wide reading also has some limitations. First, it is not effective to very young ESL learners who are not yet able to read very much on their own. Second, it is not effective to ESL learners who intend to master vocabulary related to any specific content area. Wide reading is only effective in producing general vocabulary growth. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that wide reading does not produce immediate, magic results; its effects are cumulative and they emerge over time.

*ii) providing direct instructions of specific words*

Since some words are rarely used and not knowing them bring no harm in understanding the language, recent research has suggested that it is better for beginning and weak ESL learners to focus on the most frequent words first before moving to acquiring vocabulary related to their interests and needs. In other words, teaching approaches should not focus on average vocabulary size but on learning the "right word" (Cervatiuc, 2007). Lexical studies have suggested that some words are more frequent than others thus more useful for ESL learners. Francis and Kucera (1982) suggest that the 2000 most frequent word families of English make up 79.7% of the individual words in any English text, the 3000 most frequent word families represent 84%, the 4000 most frequent word families make up about 86.7%, and the 5000 most frequent word families cover 88.6%. Therefore, the goal of any ESL learners should be acquiring these 2000 word families first because knowing them means the learners can understand approximately 80% of the words in any English text. To be most effective, direct vocabulary instructions should be dynamic and should involve a variety of techniques.

First, instructions should use both definitional and contextual information about word meanings. In the past, vocabulary instructions normally consisted of learning of words and definitions which is of limited value particularly in improving students' reading comprehension (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). ESL learners need to know how a word functions in various contexts. Thus, instructional methods that provide them with both definitional and contextual information will significantly improve comprehension. Activities that provide the students with definitional information include teaching synonyms and antonyms, rewriting definitions, and providing example sentences. As for the contextual information, activities may include having the students create sentences that contain the new word, using more than one new word in a sentence, and discussing the meaning of the same word in different sentences.

Second, instructions should actively involve ESL learners in word learning. Learners remember more when they relate new information to known information, transforming the information in their own words, generating examples, producing antonyms and synonyms, and other vocabulary learning activities.

Finally, using discussion is another effective strategy to teach vocabulary. ESL learners with little or no knowledge of some new words they encounter are often able to guess the meanings from the bits of partial knowledge contributed by their classmates because for words that they do not know or know partially the give-and-take of discussion can generate meanings. Furthermore, discussion also involves them in other ways. For instance, as they wait to be called on, they practice covertly or silently prepare a response. Therefore, even though a teacher calls on only one or a few students,

many other students anticipate that they will have to come up with an answer. As a result, discussion leads to more vocabulary learning (Stahl & Clark, 1987).

Though direct vocabulary instruction does help ESL learners to improve comprehension significantly, some disadvantages may appear. First, teaching vocabulary as they read can distract them from the main ideas of the text. Second, teaching words which are not important to comprehending the text leads them to focus on individual word meanings rather than on the overall meaning of what they read. In fact, the more they focus on word meanings, the less they spend on recalling information that is important to comprehension (Wixson, 1986). Thus, to be effective, pre-reading vocabulary activities should focus on words that relate to the major ideas in a text rather than on interesting or unusual words.

*iii) Teaching independent word-learning strategies*

Independent word-learning strategies are techniques that teachers can model and teach to ESL learners so as to help them figure out the meanings of unknown words on their own. Graves (2000) notes that if students are to be successful in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary in their reading, they need to learn *about* words not simply acquire new words. Several researchers have found that directly teaching word-learning strategies can help students become better independent word learners (Baumann et. al, 2003; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000). The effective word-learning strategies they have identified include how to use dictionaries, how to identify and use context clues, and how to use word-part information (morphological analysis).

a) Using dictionaries

According to Nation (2003), the skills required to use a dictionary differ according to whether the dictionary is used in conjunction with listening and reading (receptive use), or with speaking and writing (productive use). Each requires different set of steps. For receptive use, briefly, the steps involve getting information from the context where the word occurred, finding the dictionary entry, choosing the right sub-entry, and relating the meaning to the context and deciding if it fits. As for productive use, the steps are finding the wanted word form, checking that there are no unwanted constraints on the use of the word, working out the grammar and collocations of the word, and checking the spelling or pronunciation of the word before using it.

b) Identifying and using contextual clues

Context clues are clues to the meaning of a word that are contained in the text and illustrations that surround it. They can be definitions, examples, restatements, charts, and pictures. A study by Baumann et. al (2003) shows that middle school students who were taught to identify and use specific types of both linguistic information such as words, phrases, and sentences and non-linguistic information such as illustrations and typographic features were then able to use this information to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words in text.

Teaching students to use context clues to develop vocabulary is an extended process that involves: modeling the strategy; providing direct explanations of how, why, and when to use it; providing guided practice; gradually holding students accountable for independently using the strategy; and then providing constant reminders to apply it to reading across content area.

c) Using word part information (phonological analysis)

*Morphology* or *structural analysis* refers to the study of word parts. *Structural analysis* draws students' attention to the morphemes, the meaningful word parts, that readers can identify and put together to determine the meaning of unfamiliar word. Knowledge of morphemes and morphology plays a valuable role in word learning from context because readers can use such knowledge to examine unfamiliar words and figure out their meanings (Carlisle, 2004). It is estimated that more than 60 percent of the new words that readers encounter have easily identifiable morphological structure (Nagy et al., 1989). In addition, Nagy and Anderson's (1984) analysis of printed school English materials also made clear that a large number of words that students encounter in reading are derivatives or inflections of familiar root words. Thus, they can be broken into parts namely root words, prefixes, and suffixes.

To be most effective, word-part instructions should teach students the meanings of particular word parts as well as a strategy for when and why to use them. Successful instructions do not require students to recite the meanings of word parts they encounter. Rather, they involve having the students read texts with words that use the word parts and give them opportunities to learn about word origins, derivations, and usage. Such a concept towards word learning can stir students' interest in learning more about language and building word consciousness (Baumann et al., 2003).

iv) Using computer technology

Using computer technology is cited as a promising technique for increasing vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000). A few studies, in fact, do suggest some possibilities for ways that computers might assist in vocabulary learning (Davidson, Elcock, & Noyes, 1996; Heller et al., 1993; Reinking & Rickman, 1990). Wood (2001) suggests that the greatest advantage of computer technology lies in certain capabilities that are not found in print material such as

game-like format, hyperlinks, online dictionaries and reference materials, animations, and access to contend-area-related websites.

Cobb (2007), furthermore, claims that acquiring vocabulary randomly could not promise the most needed and frequent words are learned. He thus suggests an alternative way to learn the 2000 most frequent word families. They could be learned from online frequency-based word lists linked to dictionary explanations. Cobb's (2007) computer program displays word lists linked to a software providing concordances- lists of contexts exemplifying a word or word family. Though using computer-provided contexts might not be as authentic as meeting the words in natural contexts, at least "using computer concordances can get the learning process off to a good start" (Cobb, 2007). ESL teachers can incorporate the use of lexical concordances in their practice, either by using the program itself if the classrooms have access to online technologies or by printing handouts of concordances for the 2000 most frequent words.

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# Investigation Report on the Teaching of Practical English Writing

# of English Majors

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**Abstract**

The practical writing course aims at helping students have a comprehensive understanding of writing subjects and improve their abilities of analyzing and understanding texts. This paper has explored how writing textbooks are used in the writing course and pointed out that the aim should be to help students improve their ability of analysis and cultural consciousness, increase the amount of reading and improve their ability of summarizing, read more subjects and strengthen their consciousness of stylistics. This paper also noticed some problems in students' writing through the questionnaires and gave further analysis.

**Keywords:** Ability of analysis, Cultural consciousness, Ability of summarizing, Consciousness of stylistics

Practical English writing should be based on students' comprehensive knowledge of English grammar, basic skills of utilizing vocabulary and sentences and their learning and practice of some basic text types. It involves semantics, stylistics, register and social culture as well as pure language knowledge. In this course, in addition to some practical topics, students' writing skills should also be improved; besides five-step articles, they are expected to deal with more advanced academic writing, to collect and produce, analyze and organize information (Williams, 2007). Accordingly, teachers are supposed to carefully search for proper textbooks, practical text types and reading materials for English writing course.

## 1. The Basic Themes of the Course

### 1.1 Improving Analysis Ability and Cultural Consciousness

One of the teaching materials used in this course is *College Writing Skills with Readings* introduced to China by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. In this book, four principles for revising a composition are summarized, including unity, support, coherence and sentence skills. In addition, some exercises related to 9 text types are designed to have a comprehensible level of complexity.

In this book, with both the first and the second drafts offered for each topic, the compiler points out the problems lying in the first draft. In the teaching process, teachers can give students opportunity to read the first draft and state their viewpoints first of all and then have theirs compared with those of the compiler. This is an effective way to improve students' analysis ability and avoid similar problems in their own writing.

In addition, the sample articles chosen by the compiler embody a large amount of cultural information. By reading a lot, students will learn about the hidden cultural connotation as well as enlarge their vocabulary and acquire the native speakers' writing structure. Let's take the topic of "The Hazards of Moviegoing" as an example. For Chinese students, maybe this topic is related to unavailable tickets or the crowd. However, the vocabulary with strong cultural color has impact on students' vision and thinking. First, some examples of western movies are given at the very beginning of the article. For example, *Forrest Gump* and *The Extra-Terrestrial* challenge those who are not well informed of western culture. Besides, some specific expressions are used in this article, such as "patrons" is used instead of "moviegoer" and some expressions are used to exhibit American food culture including "bubble gum", "crushed Raisins", "Milk Duds", "concession stand" and so on. When analyzing this article, students' attention should be focused on not only how the author puts his argument across to the readers but the hidden movie culture. Accordingly, teachers are expected to help students to absorb western culture effectively and encourage them to embody their own cultural information consciously in future writing practice.

### 1.2 Enlarging the Volume of Reading and Improving Summarizing Ability

Another material used in this course is *Destinations: Writing for Academic Success* introduced by China Renmin University Press. In this textbook, each unit is related to a different topic, for which several reading passages are given. Besides, each passage is attached by a summary, hence providing a good chance to practice students' summarizing ability. Teachers give assignments to write a summary, then revise it according to the fixed standards and point out problems lying in it, such as using too many words from the original, misunderstanding the author's words, incomplete

summary and some omissions. After that, students are made to compare their articles with the sample and find out something they should learn from, such as vocabulary, coherence, transformation of sentence structures and so on. With such practice in reading and comparing passages, students will be able to acquire new vocabulary and correct their errors.

*1.3 Learning a Variety of Subject Matters and Enhancing Stylistic Awareness*

According to the survey conducted by Huiping Cai in 2006, practical writing covers a wide range of subject matters including advertisements, resumes, summaries, book reports, instructions, letters of applying for studying chance, application letters, messages, notices, lost and found notices, essays, invitation letters, business letters, abstracts, experiment reports and so on. A third material is *Functional Varieties of English* Written by Wenzhong Hu and Zhenfu Wu, which covers a variety of practical writing passages including notices, advertisements, instructions, tourist cards, letters and resumes collected by the compilers from Australia and Britain and therefore is quite interesting.

Another book, *English Stylistics* by Youzhi Xu, is used together with *Functional Varieties of English* because there is no theoretical knowledge in the latter while the former compensates for it with its detailed elaboration on the variables and styles of language, formal and informal expressions, speech language as well as advertising language.

## 2. Effects

Students used to hold the opinion that the writing course means only their writing practice by following samples. However, after nearly two terms' experiment and exploration, both students and teachers have realized the great importance of theory in writing. Only with theoretical guidance in material selection and analysis will students' capacity in information analysis be effectively improved. In this specific course, the genre approach is employed (Williams D23), which, appearing in the middle 1980s, involves sample analysis, imitation writing and independent writing as its main steps. First, samples can be employed to introduce a genre and give analysis on its schematic structure. Teachers are expected to focus on the analysis on genre structure, language characteristics, relevant social context and communication goals and to provide students with some necessary knowledge about relevant social culture, history, custom and so on. Through such an analysis process, students will have thorough knowledge about the forms and contents of this genre, hence laying a solid foundation for their future writing practice. Second, teachers as well as students deal with writing passages of this genre together, including reading, research, collecting and sorting out materials and writing. Here imitation writing doesn't mean copying samples but consciously employing the knowledge related to certain genre acquired from the previous step and enabling students to internalize the structure and language characteristics into their knowledge structure. In the third step, students are supposed to conduct a research on a topic and then write a passage of this genre.

After their study on samples, students will compose passages with individual styles. With advertisements as an example, students displayed their talent in their design after learning that an advertisement is made up of illustrations, the heading and the text. It turned out that they created advertisements with Chinese characteristics while English expressions like this--- Selling the bike with tears. When asked to write long passages, if the given topic is related to certain unit in their coursebook, students will begin with summarizing the text and further state their own opinions. For example, they learned from Lesson One in *Destinations: Writing for Academic Success* some different learning styles and realized their shortage of knowledge in this aspect. As a result, they began their composition with their own shortcomings and then explained their own learning styles (visual, audio and tactile). Although a majority of students still copied many sentences from the text without any change, their sense of making study serve the practical purpose has been constantly improved, desiring to enlarge their range of knowledge by learning the vocabulary and styles of the texts they have read.

In the previous term, students still failed to give a systematic explanation of textual features when analyzing texts. On one hand, they hadn't finished their learning in linguistics, hence lacking the knowledge about textual features; on the other hand, due to my insufficient emphasis on stylistics, students' analysis on some materials seemed too general, superficial and imperfect. Therefore, some theories on stylistics were added this term, including advertisement and speech. From what perspectives should the analysis be conducted since different textual features are displayed in different texts? At this point, I referred to Youzhi Xu's *English Stylistics* which systematically explains the features of advertisement and speech in syntax, semantics and lexicology. With its help, students tended to sort out the thread of this type of texts instead of simply following the literary contents. In addition to some former remarks like "this passage has a formal style", students have realized in what ways the formal style should be exhibited now. There is no doubt that such a sense of systematic analysis is quite gratifying. For those students who will further their linguistic researches, this may enhance their knowledge in stylistics; for more average students, such an idea will be enhanced that their analysis and evaluation on anything should be based on adequate grounds for others to accept and believe.

## 3. Questionnaire Analysis

I conducted a questionnaire survey in my class at the end of this term to learn about their writing achievements. Finally

65 valid questionnaires were returned among all the 70 ones distributed to English majors. This survey involved students' overall impression of the writing course, the amount of reading materials, the amount of writing tasks, the difficulty level of writing tasks, the balance between theory and practice, methods of instruction, the revision of students' compositions, students' progress, whether their goals are achieved or not, the influences of the given material on writing tasks, the gap between the sample summary and students' one, what writing tasks are more helpful to improve students' writing level, some factors to be emphasized in reading and some to be considered in writing and so on.

In Table 1, 10.77% of the surveyed students hold a very positive attitude towards this course; 66.15% hold a positive one. A majority of students' general impression of this course is manifested in the following aspects in Table 2 to Table 9: the amount of reading materials for students, the amount of writing tasks, the difficulty level of writing, the balance between theory and practice, methods of instruction, the revision of students' compositions, students' progress and whether their goals are achieved or not. Most students' choices in the above aspects agree with their impression shown in Table 1 and these data reflect students' objective evaluation on many aspects of this course truly. However, 10% of the surveyed students feel dissatisfied at some of these above aspects, such as insufficient writing tasks, imbalance between theory and practice, one-fold method of instruction, ineffective revision of students' compositions, students' dissatisfaction at their own progress, failure to achieve their goals and so on. Accordingly, teachers are supposed to improve their teaching methods in the above aspects, to have more interaction with students and therefore to learn about students' demands. Table 10 to Table 14 mainly reflect students' writing achievements based on the genre approach. 27.69% of the surveyed students claim that the given material has great influences on them in the independent writing step; 61.54% admit such influences. This shows their intentional utilization of knowledge into their new writing tasks. It is specifically shown in Table 13 and Table 14 that students pay more attention to textural features when reading passages, including cultural elements, profound thought, vocabulary and other information in the proper order and more to profound thought, which is followed by textural features, cultural elements, vocabulary and other information when writing passages. In spite of the different proportions among the elements in Table 13 and 14, students' active reading is obviously shown. Students' least emphasis on vocabulary further supports the result in Table 11: 36.92% think that there is a large gap between the sample summary and their own ones; 44.62% think the gap is proper; only 16.92% think it quite narrow. Actually, it is their ignorance of vocabulary that leads to such a large gap. According to Jessica Williams (2007), students have to acquire new vocabulary in order to compose good summaries. Summary exercise provides a good chance for second language learners to practice their summarizing ability, that is, to try finding proper vocabulary to describe the same thing. Vocabulary accumulation can help to improve students' expressive ability in a variety of subject matters. As is revealed in the survey on what writing tasks are more helpful to improve students' writing level, assignments after reading samples and practical writing tasks come first, which is followed by summaries, book reports, analysis on a passage and other writing tasks. Obviously, students wish to enlarge their range of knowledge on textual features, cultural elements, profound thought and vocabulary and so on, then to internalize them and apply them to their writing practice. Meanwhile, many students' positive attitudes towards writing summaries and book reports prove their desire to read more materials and express them in their own words. In this case, teachers are expected to give proper summary assignments for students to have a comparison between their own summaries with the sample one and finally to find out the gap between the two.

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Table 1. The overall impression of the writing course

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | very positive | positive | less than positive | negative |
|  | 10.77% | 66.15% | 23.07% | 0% |

Table 2. The amount of reading materials

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **2** | too great | sufficient | adequate | insufficient |
| | 6.15% | 61.53% | 27.69% | 4.62% |

Table 3. The amount of writing tasks

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **3** | too great | sufficient | adequate | insufficient |
| | 9.23% | 36.92% | 40% | 13.85% |

Table 4. The difficulty level of writing

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4** | Too high      . | good | fair | poor |
| | 1.54% | 29.23% | 64.62% | 4.62% |

Table 5. The balance between theory and practice

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5** | very good | good | fair | poor |
| | 3.08% | 40% | 44.62% | 12.31% |

Table 6. The methods of instruction

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6** | very helpful | helpful | adequate | not helpful |
| | 13.85% | 46.15% | 27.69% | 12.31% |

Table 7. The revision of students' compositions

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **7** | very helpful | helpful | adequate | not helpful |
| | 7.69% | 56.92% | 24.62% | 10.77% |

Table 8. Students' Progress

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **8** | very good | good | adequate | poor |
| | 1.54% | 40% | 40% | 18.46% |

Table 9. Students' achievement of their goals

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **9** | fully | almost fully | adequately | poorly |
| | 4.62% | 10.77% | 66.15% | 18.46% |

Table 10. The influences of the given material on writing tasks

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **10** | big | little | average | none |
| | 27.69% | 10.77% | 61.54% | 0% |

Table 11. The gap between the sample summary and students' summaries

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **11** | big | small | average | none |
| | 36.92% | 16.92% | 44.62% | 1.54% |

Table 12. The writing tasks helpful to improve students' writing level

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **12** | just list a topic | . first read an original essay and then list some topics | analyze an essay | write a summary or book report | Any practical writing | Other forms |
| | 18.46% | 46.15% | 30.77% | 32.30% | 46.15% | 6.15% |

Table 13. The factors to be focused on in reading

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **13** | Cultural factors | vocabularies | stylistic features | deep thoughts | Other information |
| | 47.69% | 33.85% | 60% | 43.08% | 13.85% |

Table 14. The factors to be considered in writing

| Number\choice | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **14** | cultural factors . | vocabularies | stylistic features | deep thoughts | other information |
| | 32.31% | 27.69% | 52.31% | 64.62% | 10.77% |

**Questionnaire**

**Class**_____                    **Name**_____

1.    Your overall impression of the writing course is____.

       A.  very positive   B. positive       C. less than positive       D. negative

2.    The amount of reading material is _____.

       A.  too great     B. sufficient   C. adequate       D. insufficient

3.    The amount of written work is _____.

       A.  too great     B. sufficient   C. adequate       D. insufficient

4.    The level of difficulty is _____.

       A.  too high     B. good     C. fair     D. poor

5.    The balance between theory and practice is_____.

       A.  very good     B. good     C. fair   D. poor

6.    The method of instruction is _____.

       A.  very helpful     B. helpful     C. adequate   D. not helpful

7.    The revision of student compositions and problems is _____.

       A.  very helpful     B. helpful     C. adequate   D. not helpful

8.    Your progress has been_____.

       A.  very good   B. good   C. adequate   D. poor

9.    Your goals and expectations have been met_____.

       A. fully     B. almost fully   C. adequately   D. poorly

10.   Teachers may assign you writing assignments after you finish reading some related passages. When you write, the influence of the original passages is ____.

       A.  big     B. little     C. average       D. none

11.   When you summarize an article, you find the gap between your summary and the sample summary is_____.

       A.  big   B. small   C. average       D. none

12.   Do you think what kind of assignments will be more helpful to your level of writing?

       A. just list a topic       B. first read an original essay and then list some topics

     C. analyze an essay     D. write a summary or book report    E any practical writing F. other forms_____

13. When you read essays written by foreign students or professionals, what information are you usually more concerned with?

    A. cultural factors     B. vocabularies     C. stylistic features     D. deep thoughts

    E. other information_____

14. When you write an essay, what information do you usually take into consideration?

    A. cultural factors     B. vocabularies     C. stylistic features     D. deep thoughts

    E. other information_____

# Team Teaching and the Application in the Course *English Teaching Methodology* by CET and NSET in China

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**Abstract**

Based on the experiences of team teaching the course *English Teaching Methodology* to 2 classes of adult in-service teachers in a teacher training university in China for one year, this paper intends to discuss the background and the concept of the term team teaching, summarize the models of the team teaching , how the models of team teaching was applied in the course *English Teaching Methodology* and its implication to EFL teaching, and provide team teachers with specific tips on how to teach collaboratively and effectively as equal partners in the same EFL classroom.

**Keywords**: Team teaching, Co-plan, Co-presentation

## 1. Introduction

Team teaching is a strategy that has been used across U.S high school at all levels and for different purposes since 1960s. In recent years, team-taught courses have become an important part of the university curriculum in America (Anderson, & Landy, 2006).

Historically, team teaching has been seen as a practice suited for gaining better control of large groups of students (Ivins, 1964) or, in some cases, as a method for prescribing teacher actions (York, 1971).Occasionally, it has been appreciated as a way to inject variety into the traditional single-subject, subject-teacher classroom (Vars,1969). More recently, collaborative teaching has been situated in the context of school improvement (Jacobs, 1999) and inter-and intrapersonal knowledge as important considerations in team teaching has been examined (Collinson, 1999).

Though team teaching has been around for years, but most of the research is about the education for the exceptional children, the tips and strategies of successful team teaching, the models and types of team teaching in the general education. As for the team teaching practice in EFL, few of the articles or books can be found.

We (Wang, the Chinese English teacher (CET) and Liz, the native speaking English teacher (NSET)) team taught the course English Teaching Methodology to 2 classes of adult in-service teachers in a teacher training university in China for one year. Based on our experiences and the definitions and models of team teaching, this paper summarizes how we team taught the course *English Teaching Methodology* and its implication to EFL teaching, and provides team teachers with details on how to teach collaboratively and effectively as equal partners in the same EFL classroom.

## 2. Definitions and models of team teaching

Team teaching can be defined as a group of two or more teachers working together to plan conduct and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of learners. Quinn and Kanter (1984) defined team teaching as "simply team work between two qualified instructors who, together, make presentation to an audience." Davis (1995) noted all team teaching efforts "include two or more faculty in some level of collaboration in the planning and delivery of a course.". Team teaching implies two broad categories: one is that two or more instructors are teaching the same students at the same time within the same classroom. This implies that each speaks freely during large-group instruction and moves among all the students in the class.; the other is that the instructors work together but do not necessarily teach the same groups of students nor necessarily teach at the same time.

Sharon (1997) identified several alternative models of co-teaching: A: One Group: one lead teacher, one teacher "teaching on purpose"; B: Two Groups: Two teachers teach same contents; C: Two groups: One teacher re-teaches, one teacher teaches alternative information; D: Multiple Groups: Two teachers monitor/teach; content may vary; E: One group: two teachers teach same content; Watkins and Caffarella (1999) identified four types of teams based on variations in working style: parallel teaching, serial teaching, co-teaching, and co-facilitation; Friend and Cook (2003) described more common approaches as One-Teach-One Support, One-Teach-One Drift, Alternative Teaching, Parallel Teaching, Station Teaching, and Team Teaching; Six models of team teaching have been identified by Robinson and Schaible (1995).

·Traditional Team Teaching: In this case, the teachers actively share the instruction of content and skills to all students. For example, one teacher may present the new material to the students while the other teacher constructs a concept map on the overhead projector as the students listen to the presenting teacher.

·Collaborative Teaching: This academic experience describes a traditional team situation in which the team teachers work together in designing the course and teach the material not by the usually monologue, but rather by exchanging and discussing ideas and theories in front of the learners. Not only so the team teachers work together, but the course itself uses group learning techniques for the learners, such as small-group work, student-led discussion and joint test-taking.

·Complimentary/Supportive Team Teaching: This situation occurs when one teacher is responsible for teaching the content to the students, while the other teacher takes charge of providing follow-up activities on related topics or on study skills.

·Parallel Instruction: In this setting, the class is divided into two groups and each teacher is responsible for teaching the same material to her/his smaller group. This model is usually used in conjunction with other forms of team teaching ,and is ideally suited to the situation when students are involved in projects or problem-solving activities, as the instructor can roam and give students individualized support.

·Differentiated Split Class: This type of teaching involves dividing the class into smaller groups according to learning needs .Each educator provides the respective group with the instruction required to meet their learning needs. For example, a class may be divided into those learners who grasp adding fractions and those who need more practice with the addition of fractions. One teacher would challenge the learners who grasped the concept more quickly, while the second teacher would likely review or re-teach those students who require further instruction.

·Monitoring Teacher: This situation occurs when one teacher assumes the responsibility for instructing the entire class, while the other teacher circulates the room and monitors student understanding and behavior..

## 3. Application

### 3.1 Background

**Classes:** Class A and Class B, Grade 03 in English department in Gansu Lianhe University, Lanzhou, China

**Students:** adult in-service teachers (most of them are the English teachers in the middle schools in Gansu province, China)

**Major:** English education

**Course:** English Teaching Methodology

**Textbook:** "A Course in English Language Teaching" by Wang Qiang, Chen Xiaotang  Cheryl Moen and Bob Adamson

**Team teachers:** Wang, the CET, Chinese L1, English L2 and Liz, the NSET, English L1.

**Time:** 2003.9-2004.7

**Models of team teaching:** We tried all models mentioned in the above 2.section according to the contents we taught and types of class, not just select one of them.

### 3.2 Instructional planning

Planning is an integral part of any effective teacher's schedule and is a proactive way to determine what standards will be addressed. The core of team teaching is determining what instructional techniques will be most efficient and effective in helping all students meet those standards. One of the major benefits of team teaching is that teachers can bring different areas of expertise. These diverse skills are helpful during the planning stage, as both instructors' can find ways to use their strengths to ensure that the lesson is appropriately differentiated for a class. Many considerations must be reviewed before planning to do team teaching.

Firstly, the whole process of team teaching has to be planned. In order to ensure the planning work successfully, both team teachers need to get administrative support and the agreement of leaders in scheduling common planning periods, and permission to apply team teaching in certain courses, and must then schedule once or twice a week to use part of a period for planning. In our team teaching experience, an entire 90-minutes period a day each week should be ample amount of time to plan the lessons for one or two weeks.

Secondly, carefully co-planned lesson plan must be completed. At the outset, we had to sit down and work out how we would divide up the syllabus. Taking one chapter per two-hour lesson was not feasible, because some chapters were longer than others, and some more important than others. We discussed this and then constructed a tentative plan, which we revised as we went along. We had a meeting to plan the lessons. This planning was vital for the success of our team teaching.

Based on our experiences, we have identified several issues that team teachers should address when they are planning if they want to be successful:

• Whose classroom management rules do we use?

Most team teachers know the types of academic and social behavior they find acceptable and unacceptable. Over the years, both CET and NSET have established their own ways to deal with students' inappropriate behavior. Teachers should discuss their classroom management styles and the roles they expect of each other in maintaining a smoothly running classroom.

• What do we tell the students?

The students should be informed that they have two teachers and that both teachers have the same authority. In interviews we have conducted, many students who have participated in team teaching classrooms tell us that having two teachers is better because everyone gets more help and they can benefit from two teachers.

• How can we find time to co-plan?

The most pervasive concern of both teachers in team teaching situations is obtaining sufficient time during the school day to plan and discuss instruction and student progress. If a common planning period is not a possibility, explore other options, such as meeting during student activities, or meeting during regular lunch or after-school times. We sometimes found it difficult to find the time to plan lessons. We had to resort to meeting on the school bus, but we did manage to hold meetings regularly and successfully.

*3.3 Instructional presentation*

The actual process of teaching in the same classroom at the same time to the same students is often the most difficult component. However, instructional presentation is the most rewarding part of team teaching.

We took turns to do a warm-up exercise by the way of One-Teach-One Support at the beginning of the class. Then the first teacher would begin – according to what had been planned. CET preferred to do more of the theory and NSET handled more of the practical application and activities. While one was teaching, the other would also be standing in front of the class – maybe by the door or window. The idea was that the other teacher was free to add something when appropriate. The teaching teacher would occasionally ask the other to add an example or give an opinion, or at other times the non-teaching teacher would ask if they could add something. One has to be careful here as there is always a lot to add in methodology. It is easy for one teacher to take more than their allotted time. CET would sometimes use Chinese to explain, but seldom. If CET said something in Chinese, he told NSET what he was saying in English. CET presented the Chinese teaching methods – sometimes criticizing them and at other times saying he thought they were very appropriate in China. We demonstrated some methods together, such as singing, or actions. Even though this was the first time we'd ever done team teaching, we were very pleased with the lessons. We enjoyed the good relationship in the lessons and had fun teaching together. We even joked with each other a bit, which the students enjoyed. Teachers' interaction in presentation can also be regarded as a model of teaching for students to follow in their own future teaching, and it can also be as a learning opportunity for students.

*3.4 Assessment*

Assessing students to determine if they are learning and to identify what instructional changes may need to be made is an ideal area for collaboration. Both of us worked together to determine what was working instructionally for the whole class, and what areas may need revision or re-addressing. However, as with the other areas of team teaching, assessment requires that team teachers take time to discuss potential areas for concern or disagreement before they become a real issue. We wrote the exam paper together – CET concentrated on the parts he taught and NSET on the parts she taught. Then we each marked the parts we wrote, but discussed the marks and came to an agreement about the passes and failures.

**4. Implications**

In order to team teach successfully, language teachers need cooperation both in class and out of class. The followings are some implications of team teaching:

*4.1 Team-teaching personal relationship*

Team teachers' personal characteristics, common knowledge, and skills and attitudes will influence the process of team teaching.

• Team teachers should have personal characteristics that enable them to work effectively with another instructor.

• Team teachers should have sets of common knowledge and skills.

• Team teachers should have discipline-specific knowledge and skills.

• Team teaching should be voluntary.

*4.2 The professional relationship*

Team teachers need to have unique professional relationships.

• The professional relationship is built on parity, communication, respect, and trust.

• Team teachers make a commitment to building and maintaining their professional relationship.

*4.3 Co-planning*

Team teachers must discuss the following issues when they are planning together before beginning to teach together to help to prevent conflict later and make the team more efficient at the outset:

• What kind of materials, books and supplies will you choose?

• Which materials are mine, which are yours, and which are ours?

• How can you set aside several hours of joint planning per week?

• Which content should each of us teach?

• What content should be divided?

• What content should be taught jointly?

• How will you keep records? What is the grading system?

• What are the strength and weakness of both team teachers?

• What are the things you have in common?

• What are the things that make you different?

• Do you both have the same level of expertise about the curriculum and instructing students?

• How will you ensure that you both are actively involved and neither feels over- or underutilized?

• What feedback structure can you create to assist in your regular communication?

• How can you ensure that this schedule will be maintained consistently so that both team teachers can trust it?

• How will you maintain communication between team taught sessions?

Additionally, team teachers also need to discuss and then make decisions about the following issues:

• How will you make best use of mutual planning time, how to evaluate progress, grades?

• How will you develop class rules and behavior management?

• How will you communicate with other personnel?

• How will you get to know your partner?

*4.4 Classroom dynamics*

The interactions in a team taught classroom are unique to this teaching arrangement. Team teachers need to discuss the following issues:

• Team teachers should clearly define classroom roles and responsibilities.

• Team teachers' instructional interactions should reflect their professional relationship.

• The curriculum in team-taught classes should explicitly address academic, developmental, and compensatory criteria, and should reflect the needs of students in the class.

• Team teachers should monitor their efforts.

**5. Conclusion**

Team teaching in EFL is a new area to study. It can be an extremely beneficial and professionally rewarding experience if all goes well. In order to team teach successfully, both the CET and NSET need to cooperate and to maintain respect for each other, both inside and outside the classroom. As discussed above, team teachers also need to develop and establish a special relationship, both personally and professionally..

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# The Effect of Metadiscourse Awareness on L2 Reading Comprehension:

# A Case of Iranian EFL Learners

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**Abstract**

This research attempts to investigate the degree of students' achievement in reading comprehension in English as a foreign language through explicit instruction in metadiscourse markers. For this purpose, 80 students studying at a language school (placed at intermediate levels of English language proficiency) were chosen to participate in the experiment. Every possible measure was taken to ensure that the participants lacked enough knowledge about metadiscourse. The participants were then randomly divided into four equal groups each containing twenty students. The first experimental group (EG1) included twenty participants who received instructions in both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. The second experimental group (EG2) received instructions in only textual metadiscourse markers. The third experimental group (EG3) received instructions in only interpersonal metadiscourse. The control group received no specific instructions in metadiscourse and was only exposed to some input enhancement material and relevant exercises.

As a result of running a number of statistical procedures, instruction on metadiscourse revealed a positive effect on the participants' achievement in reading comprehension in English. The results of the study have some implications for materials designers; they can improve a learner's ability to understand and remember information from the text by improving it textually and interpersonally.

**Keywords:** Metadiscourse, Metadiscourse Markers, Textual Metadiscourse Markers, Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers, Reading Comprehension

## 1. Introduction

Issues in second/ foreign Language have attracted the attention of researchers, language teachers, and educators. They have always been concerned with the question of how a learner develops listening, speaking, reading and writing. It seems that among so many questions, problems and discussions posed regarding these various language skills many of them have aimed at the acquisition and development of reading comprehension skill in ESL/EFL situations (Alderson, 2000).

Notions of reading comprehension have changed dramatically over the past decades. Reading approaches have moved from a behavioral perspective, which dominated the field from the turn of the century to the sixties and seventies, to a holistic or interactive approach, which began in the late seventies, and continues to shape our thinking about reading comprehension today. Practitioners of the interactive model view reading as a cognitive, developmental, and socially constructed task that goes beyond understanding the words on a page. In the past, reading was considered a relatively static activity. Meaning was embedded in the text, and the reader's job was to understand what was being transmitted via the words on the page. Current research views reading as a more dynamic process in which the reader constructs meaning based on information he/she gathers from the text. The text information as cited in

William's (1981), is presented at two levels; he points out that whenever an author writes more than a few words, he usually has to write on two levels: level of direction and the level of information. For example, look at the following sentences:

*"He writes about the subject he is addressing, of course, foreign policy or the operation of a computer (the primary topic). "But he also tells his audience directly or indirectly how they should take his subject.*

In the above two sentences, '*of course'* , 'b*ut*' , and *'also'* function as directives to the reader - they serve more to direct than to inform him. Also, in the preceding sentence, *for example,* it tells the reader how to connect that sentence to the previous ones. Williams (1981) uses the term metadiscourse to distinguish this kind of writing about reading from writing about primary topics.

Most texts contain some metadiscourse markers, without which, an author can not announce that he is changing the subject or coming to a conclusion, that what he is asserting is more or less reliable, or that his ideas are important. Without metadiscourse, he could not define terms or acknowledge a difficult line of thought, or even the existence of a reader (Cf. Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 2004; 2005). Metadiscourse awareness is based on a view of writing as a social engagement and, in academic contexts, reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to engage readers, signal their guiding and organizing attempts, commitments, and attitudes (Hyland and Tse, 2004). Thus, motivated by the above introductory statements,the present study was intended to ascertain whether explicit instruction in elements of metadiscourse could affect EFL learners' achievement in reading comprehension.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Since reading is regarded as a chief goal in EFL contexts, it is necessary to have a few words on its importance in language learning. According to Anderson (1991), in schools today the major emphasis is usually placed upon the 'productive' skills of speaking and writing because they constitute easy standards for assessing achievement. Yet, as Jenkinson (1998) mentions, the reading process is one of the main vehicles for receptive learning, stressing that "books are still a prime source of knowledge" (p. 66).

Current views of reading regard reading as an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text resulting in comprehension. The text presents words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning: by activating metadiscoursive skills (Crismore 1989).

But what is metadiscourse and what is the role of metadiscourse in reading comprehension? In considering the pragmatics of metadiscourse in academic context, Ken Hyland defines written metadiscourse as those "aspects of a text, which explicitly organize the discourse, engage the audience and signal the writer's attitude" (1998: 437). He further states that:

*Based on a view of writing as a social and communicative engagement between writer and reader, metadiscourse focuses our attention on the ways writers project themselves into their work to signal their communicative intentions. It is a central pragmatic construct which allows us to see how writers seek to influence readers' understandings of both the text and their attitude towards its content and the audience (Hyland 1998: 437).*

With metadiscourse awareness and strategies for using it, readers will better understand the author's text plan (Crismore, 1990). They will know whether they are reading the introduction, the body or conclusion of a text; they will know when the author has shifted to a different topic or defined a text; they will understand that an author is conceding his point or that he considers certain ideas more important than others.

Attention must be paid to giving students metacognitive awareness of metadiscourse and strategies for its use so that they may understand how to take the author, maintain schemas by connecting sentences, shift topics, recognize an introduction, transition, and a conclusion, recognize the author's attitudes and whether he is being subjective or objective, and recognize the relevance signals and circumstances, which define the rhetorical situation of the text. Readers become independent readers and are able to represent and encode the discourse into their long – term memory (Crismore, 1990).

Following the Hallidayian school of language, Hyland (1998) distinguishes between textual metadiscourse –or those "devices which allow the recovery of the writer's intentions by explicitly establishing preferred interpretations of propositional meanings" (p: 441) – and interpersonal metadiscourse –which "alerts readers to the author's perspective towards both the propositional information and the readers themselves" and as such is "essentially interactional and evaluative" (p. 443). Taxonomy of textual and interpersonal types of written metadiscourse proves to be very useful when teaching different language skills in EFL courses. In fact, it is worth pointing out that raising students' awareness of metadiscourse techniques in reading courses can be approached from two convergent disciplines: cognitive theory and pragmatics (Crismore, 1990).

From the perspective of cognition, metadiscourse will necessarily focus on text processing. In particular, through textual metadiscourse readers can reconstruct the organizing structure of the text, identify the logical linkage of contents thus processing the flow of information more easily and can also activate those conceptual schemas involved in communication of the meaning. If regarded from the premises of sociology and pragmatics, attention can be drawn to the process of interaction between author (s) and reader(s). Accordingly, interpersonal metadiscourse allows the audience to understand author's implicatures and presuppositions as well as author's stance while considering the social framework of the speech act.

Using metadiscourse means that the author has foreseen the audience's interactive frames and knowledge schemas, and that s/he has made the necessary amendments and additions to the information flow. If, as members of the same discourse community, both authors and readers use similar interpretive mappings, effective comprehension will cope with the reader's expectations in terms of contents, contextual resources and disciplinary knowledge and, as Wilson and Sperber (2004) would state, will therefore look for maximal relevance. As a result, using metadiscourse allows readers to understand discourse texture and intertextuality, to share pragmatic presuppositions, to infer intended meanings, and to interpret the institutional and ideological ties underlying the text.

Research on the effect of metadiscourse on reading and writing reveal different and sometimes intriguing results. For instance, researchers (e.g. Crawford Camiciottoli, 2003) concluded that some metadiscourse items do not always result in higher reading comprehension, because other factors may interact with metadiscourse and affect comprehension.

On the other hand, in L2 instructional contexts, it has been argued that knowledge of metadiscourse is particularly useful in helping learners of English with the difficult task of grasping the writer's position when reading authentic materials. In her exploratory study, Crawford Camiciottoli (2003) describes an exploratory classroom research with a group of Italian university students to gain further insight into the effect of metadiscourse on ESP reading comprehension. Two groups of students read selected extracts from two versions of the same text differing according to quantity and type of metadiscourse. The findings suggest that a more pronounced use of metadiscourse may be associated with improved comprehension. Although the findings of some studies (e.g. Crawford Camiciottoli, 2003; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Vande Kopple, 1985) do not provide clear evidence that the presence of metadiscourse in a text improves comprehension, they do suggest that it has a facilitating role, and is therefore a topic that merits further study.

To sum up, it can be actually figured out that metadiscourse knowledge has a key role in understanding texts no matter whether reading occurs in L1 or L2. So, this role was further investigated through an experimental study which will be explained in the following sections.

### 3. Purpose and research questions

The primary aim of this research was to provide EFL teachers with a straightforward and clear view of how explicit instruction in metadiscourse may help to enhance learners' achievement in reading comprehension.

Thus following the same line of inquiry and interest, the present research specifically aimed to investigate the effect of explicit instruction in metadiscourse on reading comprehension in Persian learners of English.

Regarding the objectives of the present investigation, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1). Does instruction on metadiscourse affect Iranian EFL learners' achievement in reading comprehension?

2). Which types of metadiscourse affect learners' reading comprehension more?

3). Does instruction in metadiscourse affect learners' achievement in other language components?

Based on the literature above and according to our experience, it was hypothesized that metadiscourse awareness has effects on reading comprehension in L2. Therfore, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1). Explicit instruction in metadiscourse does not affect Iranian EFL learners' achievement in reading comprehension.

2). All types of metadiscourse markers do not affect differently in terms of their effect on learners' reading comprehension ability.

3). Explicit instruction in metadiscourse does not affect participants overall achievement in other language components.

### 4. METHODOLOGY

#### *4.1 Participants*

The population from which the participants were selected for this study included Iranian EFL learners, who enrolled in language institutes in Isfahan, and whose first language is Persian. To begin data collection, almost all the students at the intermediate levels of English were initially considered to participate in the study.A cohort of about three hundred students who had voluntarily agreed to take part in this study were all female students whose age range was between seventeen and twenty-five. After determining their age, sex, and language proficiency level, about one hundred students were initially chosen to take part in the study based on their scores on two placement tests.

The participants were, then, randomly assigned to four groups whose description will appear as follows. Only about eighty students who had already been placed at the intermediate levels of English proficiency (through the placement test) and were unfamiliar with metadiscourse (assessed through a reading comprehension test) were randomly chosen to be included within the groups described above. In order to assure the homogeneity of the participants' levels of proficiency in all the four groups of instruction, a One-way ANOVA was later run on the placement test results for the participants in each group. The results of the ANOVA are shown in the Table below.

Insert Table 1 Here

As illustrated in the Table above, the F-observed was not significant between groups. That is, the result indicated that the four groups involved in this study were similar regarding their levels of proficiency. One main reason for choosing only eighty of our large number of candidates was related to classroom space, since classes at the institute could nearly provide enough room for, at most, twenty students. The other reason was to allow and arrange for equal numbers of students in each group and, therefore, keep the number of participants the same among the four groups in the study. The table and chart below clearly show the quality of distribution among the groups in the study.

Number and distribution of participants in each of the four groups are shown in the following Figure:

Insert Figure 1 Here

According to the objectives and design of the study, the participants were randomly assigned to three experimental groups and one control group. Their characteristics will be described as follows:

1) The first group, i.e. experimental group (1; EG1), which was supposed to receive the treatment in the form of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers, described in the Materials section below;

2) The second group of learners, comprising experimental group (2; EG2), which had to receive instructions in just textual metadiscourse markers;

3) The third group of learners, comprising experimental group (3; EG3), which had to receive instructions in just interpersonal metadiscourse markers. The results obtained from this group were then compared to the results and findings of the first and second experimental groups;

4) And the fourth group, as the control group (CG), which was to receive no specific instruction in metadiscourse and was to be exposed to ineffective instruction (placebo).

*4.2 Materials*

As to the purpose of the study, five types of tests were prepared. They included: (1) OPT for matching the participants on their levels of proficiency in each group; (2) a pretest on metadiscourse knowledge to check for initial differences among participants; (3) a pretest on reading comprehension; (4) a post-test on metadiscourse knowledge and (5) a reading comprehension post-test to measure the participants' achievement as a result of the treatment. More information about these instruments will be provided in the following order.

The first instrument (OPT) was used in order to match the participants in terms of their proficiency in the four groups under investigation. As it was pointed out in the previous section, the placement test used for choosing the learners who were supposed to take part in this study was one already designed and established by the Language Center at Oxford University and employed for institute placement purposes by the Testing and placement Committee at the institute. This placement test consisted of about 50 multiple-choice question items which the students were supposed to answer by choosing one option among three other options. The test comprised different types of items including both the components and skills of the English language. The second instrument prepared was a pretest on metadiscourse knowledge. The metadiscourse pre-test was administered to all the participants before going through grouping procedures and the relevant courses of instruction; it contained a passage adapted from the book "Reading for intermediate students" by Oxford University Press.The participants were required to underline metadiscourse markers. If the participants underlined words that had propositional meaning, they were included in one of the groups of study at random; otherwise they were eliminated.

Students in the first experimental group, to gain awareness and mastery of metadiscourse knowledge were provided with a list of definitions and examples of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse proposed by Vande Kopple (1985). They were given the opportunity to give(LIST?) synonyms for the types of metadiscourse and generate sentences using them. Students were given sentences with the metadiscourse markers deleted and were asked to supply the markers. They were given passages with metadiscourse markers and were asked to identify metadiscourse to be written down explaining the function of each marker on a sheet of paper. Students were required to use each type of metadiscourse markers (textual and interpersonal) in various types of sentences (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex and declarative, imperative, question) and also in larger units-paragraphs and passages. The students in the second experimental group were provided with similar treatments but were exposed to only textual metadiscourse markers. The third experimental group received the same instructions in terms of interpersonal metadiscourse markers only. As for the participants in the control group, they received no specific instruction in metadiscourse.

The reading comprehension post-test, examined the participants' achievement in reading comprehension at the end of their relevant courses of instruction. The participants' scores on this test were compared between and among the groups to find points of differences and significance in each. The participants were also given a 12-item metadiscourse post-test (see appendix) to evaluate their ability in recognizing metadiscourse markers in a text.

As for the scoring procedures, since each reading comprehension test contained four passages each comprising 5 questions, the maximum score was decided to be twenty, i.e. one mark for each correct answer and 0 for incorrect one, and each metadiscourse test contained a passage including 12 metadiscourse markers, the maximum score was decided to be twelve, i.e. one mark for recognizing each metadiscourse marker correctly and 0 for incorrect recognition. As a result, the analysis of the results from the tests and their comparisons are presented in the following section.

## 5. Results

In order to investigate the aforementioned null hypotheses, a number of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used. The results obtained through such analysis will be explained and delineated in the following section.

To begin with, first descriptive statistics was run in order to obtain sample statistics concerning the results of pre-tests within experimental and control groups. The descriptive statistics of the pretest results will be shown in Tables below. The maximum score for each test was decided to 20. The first pretest was a reading comprehension measure, which aimed at investigating the equality among groups before the treatments were given. As can be observed in the Table below, the groups are somehow similar in their scores on this pretest.

Insert Table 2 Here

The second pretest was to make sure of the initial differences among the four groups concerning the participants' knowledge about metadiscourse before the experiment. The following Table shows descriptive results obtained in this test.

Insert Table 3 Here

As can be observed in the above Table, the groups are also similar in their scores on the second pretest. It can be seen from the information provided in the sections below that the participants did better on the posttests as compared to the results on the pretests discussed above but to varying degrees of success. The following sections represent the data analysis confirming this remark

After all the groups in the study went through necessary treatment/placebo, they were asked to take a reading comprehension test containing four passages with five questions. Their scores on this test were then calculated and analyzed, the results of which appear in the tables and diagrams below:

Insert Table 4 Here

As is clearly depicted in the above Table, the first experimental group (that received instructions in both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse) did much better than the other three on this posttest. In addition, the second experimental group whose members received instructions in only textual metadiscourse markers performed better on the reading comprehension test than the third experimental that received instructions in only interpersonal metadiscourse markers and the third experimental group performed somehow better than the control group which scored the lowest on the test.

After the administration of the first posttest, the participants were asked to take a reading test in order to measure their ability in understanding elements of metadiscourse in a text. The statistics for the second posttest are shown in Table 5 below.

Insert Table 5 Here

As can be seen, descriptive statistics are very much similar to those obtained on the reading comprehension posttest. It is clear that the first experimental group is still in the lead, with the second experimental group following, and the third experimental group and the control group remaining in the last position

The inferential statistics (T-Test and analysis of variance) were run in order to capture the population parameters so as to set the grouping for the investigation of the stated null hypotheses. The findings obtained through such analysis will be explained and delineated in the following paragraphs.

A comparison between the reading comprehension pretest results and the results from the reading comprehension posttests for all the four groups in the study shows great improvement in the learner's reading comprehension to varying degrees. First the Paired – Samples T-Test procedure with .05 level of significance was set to see whether there exists any significant difference in terms of the subjects' gains before and after the treatment within each group. The data consisted of two measures taken by the same subjects, one before and one after the courses of instruction took place. The results of the paired TTest are shown in the Table below:

Insert Table 6 Here

The descriptive Table above displays the mean, sample size, standard error for the experimental groups. The mean column in the paired – Samples T-Test Table displays the average difference between the pre – and post – tests. By looking at the column for means, one can easily infer that across all twenty subjects in the first experimental group, level of achievement highly increased (between one to three points on average) after receiving the treatment

By further comparing the results of all the four groups in their relative T-Test table, it can clearly be observed that the first experimental group was more affected by the treatment than the other groups. Although the second experimental group had less progress than the first one, it did, however, a better performance on posttests than both the third experimental group and the comparison group. The standard deviations for the pre – and post – tests for each of the four groups reveal that subjects' achievement vary significantly with respect to the treatment they received in each group.

The significance (2-tailed) column displays the probability of obtaining a t statistic whose value is equal to or greater than that of the obtained t statistic. Since the significance Value for each pair in the table is much less than 0.05 (p < 0.05), we can conclude that the average for each level is not due to chance variation at all, and the change can be safely attributed to the relevant treatments for each group.

Applying more inferential statistics was deemed essential to provide further empirical and statistical information for supporting or rejecting the first null hypothesis regarding the first experimental group's success in reading comprehension over the comparison group that received no specific instructions in metadiscourse. For this reason, a One – way ANOVA was run on the results of the reading comprehension posttest and the groups were compared to locate the point(s) of significance between and among the groups in the study.

The ANOVA Table beneath contains within and between group descriptive statistics, F value, and significance for the first experimental group and the comparison group results on the reading comprehension posttest. The between groups (combined) test has a value below 0.05 (.000), and therefore a significant value for F, indicating that there is a significant relationship between grouping and results on the reading comprehension posttest.

**Table7.** ANOVA table depicting between and within group descriptive statistics and significance for the first experimental group and the comparison group post-test results. (p<0.05).

As we have already evidenced, these results coincide with what is observed in the reading comprehension and metadiscourse post-tests. The significance value of the observed F in above ANOVA Table is 0.00; thus we are able to reject the first null hypothesis. That is, explicit instructions in metadiscourse had a positive effect on the participants' performance on reading comprehension in English. Now as the value of observed F indicated that the groups differ in some way, we need to learn more about the structure of the differences in order to be able to reject the second null hypothesis. For this purpose, a one-way ANOVA was run, whose final results are shown in Table below.

Insert Table 8 Here

After the significant F was found, Scheffe post hoc test was used to draw sound statistical conclusions based on the observed results. Fishers LSD post hoc test was also used in order to ensure that the results obtained from the Scheffe test were valid and reliable, since LSD provides a rather stronger view of the data than Scheffe.

Insert Table 9 Here

As the closer study of the above Table shows, we have gained significant results for all our three comparisons among the groups. The "Mean Differences" column helps to "see" the differences between and among group statistics. As the above Table shows, subjects in the second experimental group (EG2) performed significantly better on the reading comprehension posttest than the comparison group (a mean difference of about 3 points), and the third experimental group (EG3) performed somewhat better on the reading comprehension posttest than the comparison group (a mean difference less than one point).

The results obtained, therefore, reject the second null hypothesis, that all types of metadiscourse markers do not affect reading comprehension in Persian learners of English.

Similar statistical operations, as those of the reading comprehension posttest, were carried out on the statistics obtained from the metadiscourse posttest results in order to gain further empirical evidence for rejecting or confirming the first null hypothesis regarding the effect of explicit instruction in metadiscourse on learners' achievement in reading comprehension in English. The results are shown in the following Table:

Insert Table 10 Here

Because the observed variability between groups was found to be statistically significant, Scheffe post hoc test and Fisher's LSD test were also used to locate exact sources of difference among groups. The following table gives a precise sketch of the results of the Scheffe posthoc tests:

Table11. Multiple Comparisons among the four groups on the metadiscourse posttest results using Scheffe and Fisher's LSD posthoc tests (p<0.05)

A second look at the metadiscourse posttest ANOVA Tables above demonstrates roughly similar results gained upon examining both test's statistics. That is, the participants in the first experimental group could recognize metadiscourse markers much better than the participants in the other groups.

It is easy to see that the significance value of the observed F in the above ANOVA Table and the significance values obtained from the analysis of the metadiscourse posttest results through post hoc tests are 0.00 (p < 0.05). Also, as observed earlier, the significance value of the observed F for the reading comprehension posttest was highly significant, too. These significant results from both types of analyses allow us to safely reject the first null hypothesis regarding the success of metadiscourse awareness in causing learners' achievement in reading comprehension.

In order to investigate the third null hypothesis a one-way ANOVA was also run on the results of the language achievement test that was given to the participants at the end of the term. The ANOVA table beneath contains within and between group descriptive statistics,F value,and significance for group results on the language achievement posttest:

Insert Table 12 Here

As the ANOVA results show in the Table above, the between groups test has a value below 0.05 (.000), and thus a significant value for F, indicating that there is a significant relationship between grouping and results on the language achievement posttest. So, the obtained finding in the above Table rejects the third null hypothesis. That is, explicit instructions in metadiscourse had a positive effect on the subjects' language achievement in English.

As a consequence of running different inferential statistics, a number of findings emerged, which will be fully delineated and discussed in the following section.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings obtained in the light of running different statistical tests, all three null hypotheses were rejected. And certain significant findings were obtained which are presented here from most to less important ones.

• Explicit instructions in metadiscourse improved learners' reading comprehension;

• Textual metadiscourse markers improved learners' comprehension better than interpersonal metadiscourse markers;

• Interpersonal metadiscourse markers affect learners' comprehension but not ARE NOT as EFFECTIVE AS textual metadiscourse markers;

• Metadiscourse awareness in EFL courses can affect learners' other language skills and components (language achievement).

As has been mentioned several times throughout, the field of teaching/learning, in its rather long history, has witnessed various educational methods and approaches informed by different theories (Hudson, 2007).

In this study, the explicit way of teaching metadiscourse was applied, and with the help of data analysis and discussion went above, a number of intriguing findings were obtained. Following our findings, our concluding remarks want to elicit that,

1)    Instruction on metadiscourse influenced the subjects' consciousness efficiently so as to boost their ability of reading comprehension, and thus led to their significant performances on the post-test.

2)    Although instruction on all metadiscourse markers affected the subjects' performances, awareness on textual markers seemed to be note-worthy in relation to interpersonal ones.

3)    From the overall findings, it can be figured out that instruction on metadiscourse awareness not only affected the subjects' performances on reading comprehension, but also enhanced their achievement in all aspects of L2 focused during the course of experiment.

4)    In line with current findings, our results have proved how metadiscourse contains an enormous potential for teaching and learning reading skill. This study is still too limited, but it can be seen as a first contribution to the topic.Work can also be carried out in a more extensive way by selecting participants from other native language backgrounds to see whether the same problems.

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**Appendix**

Metadiscourse Posttest

**Read the following passage and underline metadiscourse markers and label their type as to whether they are textual or interpersonal.**

The child in the hospital bed was just waking up after having his tonsils taken out. His throat hurt, and he was scared. However, the young nurse standing by his bed smiled so cheerfully that the little boy smiled back. He forgot to be afraid. The young nurse was May Paxton and she was deaf.

May Paxton graduated from the Missouri School for the Deaf at Fulton near the year 1909. Three years later she went to see Dr. Katherine B. Richardson about becoming a nurse. Dr. Richardson was one of the founders of Mercy Hospital of Kansas City, Missouri. She had never heard of a deaf nurse. Dr. Richardson told May that her salary would be very small and that the work would be arduous. However, May said that hard work did not frighten her. Dr. Richardson was impressed with her, and accepted May as a student nurse. Dr. Richardson never regretted her decision. In fact, she was so pleased with May's work that she later accepted two other deaf women as student nurses. The first was Miss Marian Finch of Aberdeen, South Dakota, who was hard of hearing. The second was Miss Lillie "Bessie" Speaker of St. Joseph, Missouri. These three were called "the silent angels of Mercy Hospital" during the time they worked there.

May and Marian did not know each other before Marian was hired by the hospital. When Marian first came to the hospital, Dr. Richardson introduced May to Marian. She showed them to the room they were to share. During the next two days, the two girls wrote notes to each other. Finally, other nurses asked Marian if she knew that May was deaf. Marian ran to the bedroom and asked May in sign if she really was deaf. May answered in sign. Then, as the joke sunk in, the two girls burst into laughter. May was always conscientious about following orders. Only once did she disobey Dr. Richardson. It took a lot of time to care for all the sick children, as a result, Dr. Richardson asked the nurses not to take the time to hold the new babies when they were crying. However, May hated to see the babies cry. When Dr. Richardson was not around, she found time to hold them. This small change helped the nursery to run much more smoothly. When Dr. Richardson discovered what May was doing, she recognized that May's actions had improved the nursery, and decided to overlook May's disobedience.

In spite of their success, none of the girls finished the nursing program. Marian had to go back to South Dakota because of a family problem. Illness forced Bessie to give up her nursing career. May decided to give up nursing for marriage, and married Alexander Benoit. Dr. Richardson often spoke of her faith in the girls' ability to learn nursing. She wrote to May, "For three years, you have been with us ... It is wonderful to me that no man, woman or child ever, to my knowledge, made a complaint against you **...”**

Adapted from: Goodstein, A. & Walworth, M. (1979). Interesting Deaf Americans. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University. Used with permission from the Gallaudet University Alumni Association.
Revised by Vivion Smith and Ellen Beck

Table1. One-Way ANOVA determining group homogeneity between groups in the study

| *Source of Variation* | Sum of Squares | d.f | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 38.700 | 3 | 12.19 | .353 | .787 |
| Within Groups | 2775.100 | 76 | 36..514 | | |
| Total | 2813.800 | 79 | | | |

Table2. Descriptive statistics for each group's performance on the reading comprehension pretest: Reading comprehension

| | Groups | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | comparison | Experimental (1) | Experimental (2) | Experimental (3) |
| Mean | 14.05 | 14.15 | 13.80 | 13.90 |
| Std.Deviation Descriptives | 2.114 | 2.183 | 2.215 | 2.100 |
| Variance | 4.471 | 4.766 | 4.905 | 4.411 |
| Maximum | 18 | 19 | 18 | 18 |

Table3. Descriptive statistics for each group's performance on the metadiscourse pretest:

| | Groups | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Control | Experimental (1) | Experimental (2) | Experimental (3) |
| Mean | 4.20 | 4.15 | 4.20 | 4.15 |
| Std.Deviation | 2.042 | 2.346 | 1.963 | 2.033 |
| Variance | 4.168 | 5.503 | 3.853 | 4.134 |
| Maximum | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 |

Table4. Descriptive statistics for each group's performance on the reading comprehension posttest.

| | Control | Experimental (1) | Experimental (2) | Experimental (3) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | 13.925 | 16.50 | 16.750 | 14.350 |
| Std.Deviation | 2.41 | 2.322 | 2.226 | 2.116 |
| Variance | 4.165 | 5.395 | 4.955 | 4.476 |
| Maximum | 18 | 20 | 19 | 18 |

Table5. Descriptive statistics for the results on the second posttest.

| | Groups | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Control | Experimental (1) | Experimental (2) | Experimental (3) |
| Mean | 4.10 | 7.70 | 7.50 | 5.75 |
| Std.Deviation | 2.075 | 2.812 | 2.838 | 2.807 |
| Variance | 4.305 | 7.905 | 8.053 | 7.882 |
| Maximum | 9 | 12 | 12 | 11 |

Table6. Paired – Samples T-Test showing significant difference in the Three experimental and comparison group's performance on the reading comprehension pre-and post-test ($p < 0.05$).

**ANOVA**

*Post-test*

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 98.331 | 2 | 49.166 | 26.015 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 103.944 | 55 | 1.890 | | |
| Total | 202.276 | 57 | | | |

Table8. ANOVA table depicting between and within group descriptive statistics and significance for the second experimental group, third experimental group, and the comparison group posttest results (P<0.05).

**Paired Samples Test**

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
| | | | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | Mean | | | Lower | Upper | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | G1-Pre& G1-Post | -3.80 | 1.93581 | .43286 | -4.706 | -2.894 | -8.779 | 19 | .000 |
| Pair 2 | G2-Pre& G2-Post | -2.90 | 1.74416 | .39001 | -3.716 | -2.084 | -7.436 | 19 | .000 |
| Pair 3 | G3-Pre& G3-Post | -.650 | 2.41214 | .53937 | 1.779 | .47892 | -1.205 | 19 | .043 |
| Pair 4 | G4 - NONE | -.167 | 2.20294 | .51924 | -1.262 | .92883 | -.321 | 17 | .752 |

Table9. multiple comparisons among groups using Scheffe test and LSD post-hoc Dependent variable: score

| (I)Teaching M (J) Teaching M | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std.Error | Sig. | Confidence Interval%95 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Scheffe Control G    G Group 2 | -2.150* | .6732 | .009 | -3.842 | -.458 |
| Group 3 | -.425 | .6732 | .820 | -2.117 | 1.267 |
| Group 2         Control G | 2.150* | .6732 | .009 | .458 | 3.842 |
| Group 3 | 1.725 | .6732 | .045 | .033 | 3.417 |
| Group 3         Control G | .425 | .6732 | .820 | -1.267 | 2.117 |
| Group 2 | -1.725* | .6732 | .045 | -3.417 | -.033 |
| LSD    Control G    Group 2 | -2.150* | .6732 | .002 | .802 | 3.498 |
| Group 3 | -.425 | .6732 | .013 | .377 | 3.073 |
| Control G              Group 2 | 2.150* | .6732 | .002 | .802 | 3.498 |
| Group 3 | 1.725* | .6732 | .013 | .377 | 3.073 |
| Group 3         Control G | .425 | .6732 | .530 | -.923 | 1.773 |
| Group 2 | -1.725* | .6732 | .013 | -3.073 | -.377 |

*.The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

Table10. ANOVA Table depicting between and within group descriptive statistics and significance for the metadiscourse posttest results (p<0.05)

Post-test:Metadiscourse

| | Sum of Squares | d.f | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Between Groups** | 170.738 | 3 | 56,913 | 8.089 | .000 |
| **Within Groups** | 534,750 | 76 | 7,036 | | |
| **Total** | 705,488 | 79 | | | |

Table12. ANOVA Table depicting between and within group statistics and significance for the language achievement posttest results (P<0.05)

Posttest:Language achievement

| | Sum of Squares | d.f | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Between Groups** | 501.250 | 3 | 167,083 | 7.049 | .000 |
| **Within Groups** | 1801,500 | 76 | 23,704 | | |
| **Total** | 2302,750 | 79 | | | |

**Teaching Method**

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Control G | 20 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 |
| | Group 1 | 20 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 50.0 |
| | Group 2 | 20 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 75.0 |
| | Group 3 | 20 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 80 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Visual representation of participants' grouping distribution
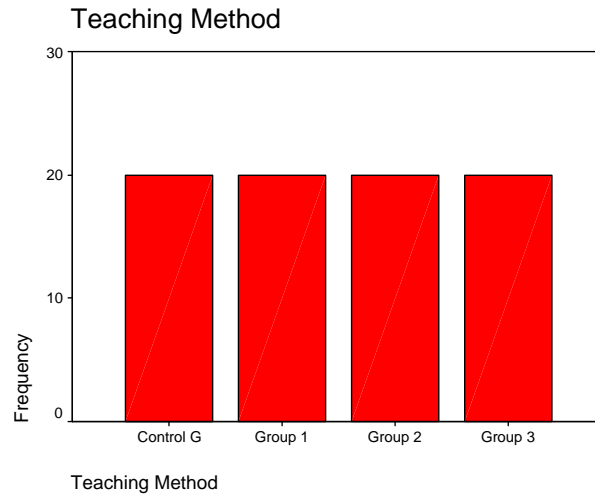


Figure 1.

# An Action Research on Deep Word Processing Strategy Instruction

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**Abstract**

For too long a time, how to memorize more words and keep them longer in mind has been a primary and everlasting problem for vocabulary teaching and learning. This study focused on deep processing as a word memorizing strategy in contextualizing, de- and re- contextualizing learning stages. It also examined possible effects of such pedagogy on vocabulary competence and attitude towards word learning. The context of the action research was an 11-week deep word processing strategy instruction program, involving 39 non-English major freshmen. The results showed that teacher's strategy-based instructional intervention affected the changes both in learners' vocabulary competence and in teachers' and learners' attitude toward word learning. These findings were discussed in terms of some issues deserving more considerations. And accommodations for future study were also made.

**Keywords:** Depths of processing, Vocabulary competence, Attitude, Action research

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary teaching and learning constitute a major problem for EFL instructors and learners, although vocabulary knowledge is an important element in EFL acquisition and serves as the steady basis of and makes a significant contribution to these traditionally basic skills listening, reading, speaking and writing(Barrow, et al, 1999). Usually learners can increase their vocabulary knowledge formally in the classroom or informally through communicating with others in after-class hours. However, as a result of input-poor acquisition environment in China, mainly depending on explicit vocabulary teaching and learning in classroom is their sole option. Teachers become tired of pouring too much time and energy into teaching new words by explaining and providing examples, only to achieve unsatisfying outcome, and learners never feel encouraged when frequently encountering unfamiliar and less familiar words, much less do they have the passion and courage to use them in daily social conversations and exchanges in an appropriate way. In addition, given English language containing a wide range of word families--more than 54,000, which is a learning goal far beyond the reach of EFL learners or even native speakers, how to memorize more words and keep them longer in mind appears to be an immense and daunting task. Thus efficient and effective word teaching and learning deserves a "should-enjoyed" position, worthy of English language instructors' and learners' proper attention.

## 2. Problem and Hypotheses

For consideration of high efficiency of word memorization and retrieval, before action, a word memorizing strategy questionnaire is conducted among 39 Chinese university students in one freshmen non-English major class in order to be aware of what kinds of methods they used to adopt and how frequent they use them, implying certain underlying reasons that results in distressing situation in teaching and learning English words. The result is presented as follows:

Insert Table 1 Here

A conclusion can be drawn from responses to the questionnaire is that rote learning is still topping the list. Reading, spelling and writing repetition are mostly employed among students. That is to say, their processing of words is shadow processing, only stopping at a superficial level where gives much weight on pronunciation and form rather than meaning. In great contrast with these above high-frequency used strategies, learning by context, guessing, and even association, who are grouped as deep encoding, are almost neglected to some extent.

However, Craik & Lockhart (1972) proposed that the deeper a stimulus is processed, the more knowledge of target words is acquired, the more persistent the memory trace will be and naturally the longer the retention will be. Here "deeper" refers to a greater degree of semantic involvement. Also Zhang and Wu's (2002) study on depth of vocabulary processing reveals that word retention has close relation to deep semantic encoding instead of shadow form encoding. The learner is able to store and retrieve information depending on the degree to which the information is processed, and better learning will happen when a deeper level of semantic processing is conducted, endless yet simple repetition has no use. To be specific, learners, through semantic encoding, can find or create an association, such as similarities, distinctions or other types of links, between information in Short-term memory and information previously in Long-term memory which serves as schema. Therefore, learners come to learn to establish a web-like structure of association and consequently have a rather hierarchical, logical and elaborative mental lexicon containing a large

number of highly organized words stored in minds. According to spreading activation model (Carroll, 2000), the organization of mental lexicon is closer to a web of interconnecting nodes, the degree of accessibility of words is determined by both structural characteristics of taxonomic and considerations of association between related concepts. That is to say, the more closely the association is related, the more facilitative it is for successful vocabulary acquisition and production.

Therefore, the hypotheses of the study go: Do deep word processing strategies work effectively for the increase of learners' vocabulary competence? If so, will this increase change long-lasting negative attitudes both teachers and learners possess towards vocabulary learning?

## 3. Plan

This study, with problem and hypotheses at hand, is designed to last for 11 weeks and aims to stimulate learners' interest and motivation, foster learners' cooperative and independent learning spirits and develop learners' vocabulary competence. The 11-week period research plan are implemented as follows:

Insert Table 2 Here

## 4. Action

The 11-week action research is designed and conducted by the author herself for the purpose of testifying the hypotheses generated from that theoretical idea that deep word processing benefits the acquisition of words. 39 non-English major freshmen participated in the study and used *New Horizon College English (Second Edition)* as their English course-book. When a target word is taught by being put into a network made up of interrelated words, it is more easily stored in learners' mental lexicon (Ronald Carter, 1999). In this study, a combined mnemonics of shadow form encoding and deep semantic encoding will be adopted to prompt learners to learn what is meaningful for them and also to learn in ways that are meaning to them. Constructivist believes that knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by cognizing subjects, and cognition is adaptive and serves as the organization of experiential world (Von Glaserfeld, 1994). In the process of learning, learners practice deep word processing skills intensively and construct their own knowledge autonomously by anchoring new information to preexisting knowledge. Except for contextualizing word learning, the procedures of the study includes two more ones, de- and re- contextualizing word learning, compared with "learning in context"--- the most popular teaching/learning strategy at present, as the following figure1 shows.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Needless to say, learning does not take place in isolation. In learning process, learners interact with knowledge, learning environment, and more importantly, with peers. This has led to a favorable consequence not only based on individuals' past experience but also on the collective experiences of the learning community. As a result, in or out of context, they eventually build up their own word network in a personal level.

## 5. Results and Analysis

For testifying H1, vocabulary competence test adapted from Appendix Ⅱ of The English-Chinese Dictionary (Lu Gusun, 2000) are employed twice before and after treatment, each time learners will be given 15 minutes to underline the known words (choosing one real words is given one point). The Appendix includes 10 word groups with each one having words ranging from Level 1 to Level 6. For consideration of time permitted, a word list of 100 items composed of words partly from Level 1 to Level 3 in Appendix and partly from CET4 and course-book are used as target words, in accordance with the participants' present overall proficiency level. Also, for the guarantee of validity of the study, the word list contains a mixture of real words and non-words (who do not exist and are formed by changing one or more letters from real words (e.g. *alleviate* became *alliviate*) (Nation, 1990), ensuring that it really measures what it wants to measure. The final results of pre- and post- test are listed in Table3.

Insert Table 3 Here

Talbe3 shows that the Mean score of post-test is 79.29, which is 0.53 higher than that of pre-test, and that the Std. Deviation of the post-test is 0.03 lower than that of pre-test, testifying that the hypothesis of deep word processing improving learners' vocabulary competence is proved to be true.

In addition, both student interview and teacher log provide a rich source for the issue that some positive attitude changes of teachers and learners do appear after deep word processing strategy teaching. See Extract 1 to 2 from student interview.

***Extract1:*** *Memorizing words has been a headache for me and I'm tired of it. But sometimes when I see other students working carefully and actively, especially our group leader, I gradually realized that it's not because I lack aptitude to learn language but the interests and motivations.*

***Extract2:*** *Initially, I would rather mechanically remember these words. Of course, I suffered a lot. It is so frustrating*

*that you can recall only a few words you've been trying to remember. But when I understand how this strategy works, I think, maybe it is not a waste of time, I think I will try.*

The above attitude changes of learners are the result of the benefits deep word processing strategies brought about, which significantly enhances learners' self-efficacy, self-esteem and cooperation spirits. (See Extract 3, 4 and 5)

*Extract3: By using the way of deep processing, we can relate new words with other familiar words, thus to enlarge our lexical size and help us to store more words and have an access to words easily and effectively.*

*Extract4: We can have a deep impression of the new word after group discussion. I like this way, although sometimes we are talking with each other instead. Learning one word means learning a group of relevant words, how fascinating it is and it is helpful to memorize more words and keep it longer.*

*Extract5: I like learn something meaningful for me. I dislike boring classes. I feel writing or speaking based on my personal life is a good way to capture our interests and learn actively. But using more new words seems to be a challenge.*

From the interview we can see that learners are more willingly and autonomously learn words than what they used to be, and tend to gradually construct their own web-like word networks by various means of deep processing. However, some problems rising in the learning process should be paid more attention to. Some learners are worse involved in classroom activities and achieve less than others, some learners feel a bit difficult to handle some tasks, such as topic-based semantic network building, new and old semantic network connecting, experience-based writing or speaking, etc., all of which are also mentioned in the following teacher log.

*The results are as expected. I'm encouraged a lot and have greater drive. Changes are happening unnoticeably. They are no longer overwhelmed by lack of confidence and become more active in classroom engagement, showing great interests in word learning. And another encouraging finding is some of them are apparently friendly and open to me during class break, which, I think, maybe is a chance to stimulate others more positively.*

*In today's class, the result is not as good as what happened in last class. The task seemed too hard for them to tackle. It is wiser to alter the original plan by giving more hints, observing first and imitating later or changing improvising speaking for text retelling, etc., in order to make it suitable for learners' level.*

## 6. Reflection

After all the efforts the author made, conclusions can be drawn that are derived from the results of action research. As is shown, two hypotheses are proved to be true, thus it is testified that deep word processing is a powerful strategy for vocabulary acquisition, facilitative for increase of learner's vocabulary competence and enhancement of learners' and teachers' positive attitude change. However, reflective activities serve as a tool for helping to deepen one's understanding of the complexities of an instructional problem, which has led to the following points to be taken into consideration:

1) Although deep word process strategy is taught explicit in classroom setting, teachers can not install this idea into learners' mind directly. On the contrary, teachers should exert a subtle influence on learners to help them to weave new lexical items into preexisting lexical network in their mental lexicon through learning in context.

2) Provide learners with more word production opportunities like speaking and writing to practice new words and chunks learned in- or out-of- class reading.

3) Deep word processing strategy should be used in combination with other word learning strategies and not be overused, requiring that teachers are able to identify learners' needs and strategies they have already used to diagnose and guide learners' strategy use, and furthermore, indicating when to use it and how to keep balance is a topic for future study.

Of course, there are still some issues hard to express clearly when thinking of the complexities, even though deep word processing is proved to be beneficial to both vocabulary competence and active attitude enhancement. Given limited scale and time, future researches are expected to give much attention to these issues.

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Table 1. A Survey of Basic Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Students

|   | Strategy | Ratio (%) |    | Strategy | Ratio (%) |
|---|----------|-----------|----|----------|-----------|
| 1 | Read repeatedly | 84.5 | 7 | Guessing | 25.8 |
| 2 | Write repeatedly | 45.8 | 8 | Association | 8.4 |
| 3 | Word formation | 33.7 | 9 | Review regularly | 56.8 |
| 4 | Synonym or antonym | 37.6 | 10 | Practice | 96.7 |
| 5 | Use context | 23.4 | 11 | Error analysis | 40.6 |
| 6 | Use dictionary | 35.9 |    |          |           |

Table 2. Schedule for Action Research on Deep Processing Vocabulary Teaching

|   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|
| Consciousness-raising lecturing | V |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Contextualizing word learning |   | V | V | V |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| De-contextualizing word learning |   |   |   |   | V | V |   |   |   |   |   |
| Re-contextualizing word learning |   |   |   |   |   |   | V |   |   |   |   |
| Extra-curriculum reading |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | V | V |   |   |
| Improvising speaking |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | V |   |
| Vocabulary competence pre-test | V |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Vocabulary competence post-test |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | V |
| Student interview |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | V |
| Teacher log | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | V | V |   |

Table 3. Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test

|           | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|-----------|----|-------|----------------|
| Pre-test  | 39 | 78.76 | 5.45 |
| Post-test | 39 | 79.29 | 5.42 |

Consciousness-raising                    introducing memory mechanism

Contextualizing word learning          1. using individuals' experience, stories, songs, etc. as a tool to
                                            contextualize learning environment;
                                        2. providing reading material and learn words in context;
                                        3. noting sound, written form and meaning of words with
                                            rules of pronunciation and spelling;
                                        4. producing self-generated images or pictures to establish
                                            form-meaning-image connections, and memorize words;
                                        5. building a semantic network of words based on reading
                                            material and relate this network to other preexisting ones.

De-contextualizing word learning     making a collective association of each word our of context
                                        1)word- formation (stem, affixes, compounding, etc.)
                                        2)semantic–related words (synonym, antonym, hyponym)
                                        3)collocation
                                        4)similar words in sound or orthography

Re-contextualizing word learning     retelling or personal experience-based writing with new words
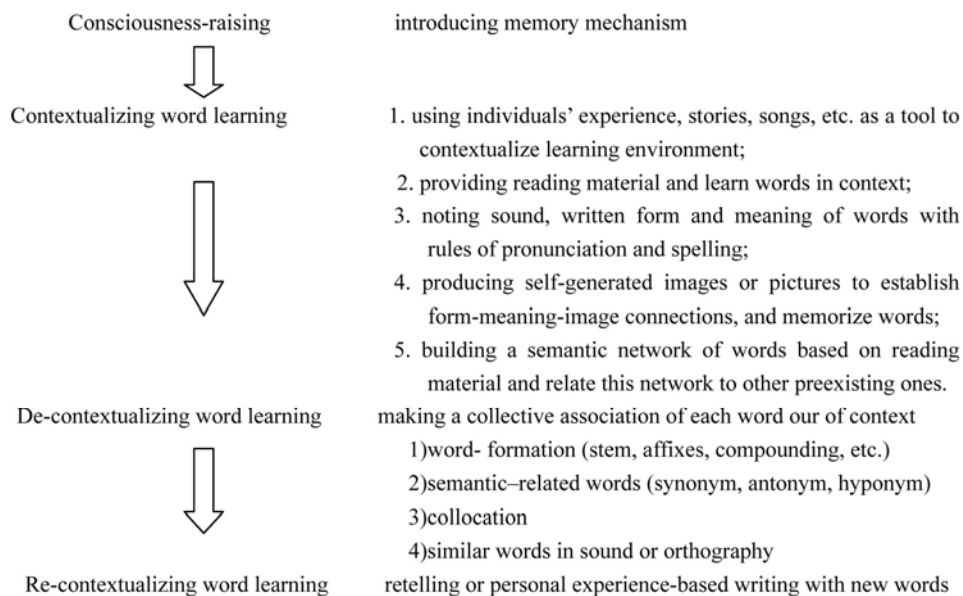
Figure 1.

# On Rater Agreement and Rater Training

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**Abstract**

This paper first analyzed two studies on rater factors and rating criteria to raise the problem of rater agreement. After that the author reveals the causes of discrepencies in rating administration by discussing rater variability and rater bias. The author argues that rater bias can not be eliminated completely, we can only reduce the error to a cetain degree by training raters. The study on rater factors can help us better understand rater variability and rater bias, train raters more effectively and find out ways to modify the scores given by raters. The author suggests that rater files which contain rater information including each rater bias tendency should be established and kept so that information can be retrieved about the selection of raters, the interpretation as well as the modification of the scores given by raters. Raters need to receive pre-service training, on-service training and pilot -on-task training.

**Keywords:** Inter-rater reliability, Rater factors, Rating scale, Rater training

## 1. Introduction

Because of the individualized uniqueness and complexity, either the assessment of written discourses or oral speeches has long been a tough issue to raters. Therefore reliability and validity have been the focus of study in the field of performance assessment. Researchers have recognized that rater judgments have an element of subjectivity, and rater judgments of the same writers or speakers often vary. As to inter-rater reliability, historically, studies used to focus on inter-rater reliability which is calculated statistically. And studies have shown that a high inter-rater reliability is not hard to get (Shohamy, 1983; Fulcher, 2003). However, as to the interpretation and application of the assessing criteria, some scholars point out that raters differ in both the interpretation and application of the criteria (Bachman, 1990). According to some researchers, even training can not eliminate the above differences (Lumley & McNamara, 1995). Therefore, since the 1990s, studies of inter-rater reliability have shown a tendency to shift from a quantitative study to a qualitative study which focuses more on the process of assessment. During this period, "think-aloud" and "immediate retrospection" have been adopted as research methods (Cumming 1990; Cumming et al, 2002; Lumley, 2002; Orr, 2002). Raters are asked to provide retrospective written reports as well as introspective verbal reports on their thought processes. Thus, the rater, as opposed to the test materials, candidates or rating scale is used as the window through which the evaluation of second language speaking performance can be observed. This type of qualitative data can tell us about the process of discriminating between candidates (Pollitt and Murray, 1996), and is useful for the purpose of rater training (Weigle, 1994), and for investigating how raters reach their decisions (Milanovic et al., 1996; Taylor, 2000). The latest research of the type in China is a study on the interpretation and application of the assessing criteria in TEM4-Oral (Wang Haizhen, 2008). The research adopts a qualitative research method based on simultaneous reports and recall reports (immediate retrospection) as well as simulated recall.

This paper aims to raise the problem of rater agreement. By analyzing studies on rater agreement and discussing rater variability and bias, the author intends to come up with ways to compensate for the systematic error caused by rater factors.

## 2. Studies on Rater Agreement

A representative research on rater agreement is a qualitative study on raters' interpretation and application of the Rating Criteria in TEM4-Oral (Wang Haizhen, 2008). In this experiment, 24 raters with 4 males and 20 females, who came from 11 different universities in China, were studied. All the raters had English Major teaching experience which varied from 1 year to 21 years. Rater's age ranged from 26 to 42. When it comes to rating experience, 11 of them were newly trained raters TEM4-Oral, while 13 of them had TEM4-Oral rating experience ranging from 1 year to 9 years. In other words, raters differed in their backgrounds. To study the decision-making process of rating, qualitative research methods of think-aloud and immediate retrospection were used. The experiment began on December of 2005. The rating experiment was composed of three stages: preparation, rater training and rating. Preparation aimed to make raters get familiar with TEM4-Oral as well as the rating criteria. Rater training consisted of the essential training in order to be a qualified TEM4-Oral rater as well as subsequent retrainings to maintain the qualification. Rating involved asking each rater to rate independently on 5 chosen sample examinees (i.e. 5 tapes which covered 4 levels were chosen among one

group of 32 tapes obtained in 2005 TEM4-Oral ). The raters were asked to rate on task 3 only, a 3-minute instaneous speech, judging by the content, sounds and intonation, vocabulary and grammar. The study finally came to three conclusions:

1). Raters applied not only the given rating criteria but also other criteria as well.

2). Different raters interpreted and applied the rating criteria in different ways.

3). There were discrepencies in the ratings of different raters toward the same examinee.

But the study also showed that despite the discrepencies in the rating process, this experiment had a high interrater reliability of 0.972.

Since we have come to the conclusion that raters show differences in interpreting and applying rating criteria, and now if we go a step further, we may presume that native raters and nonnative raters may show even greater differences in rating. And this is proved by a study on the differences in native and nonnative judgements of Chinese contestants' performances in an English speaking contest (Wen Qiufang, Liu Xiangdong & Jin Limin, 2005). The data for analysis was from the Semi-final of 2004 "CCTV Cup" English Speaking Contest in which there were 96 contestants and 11 judges, including five native speakers and six nonnative speakers. The native judges were foreign teachers teaching English in Chinese tertiary institutions while the nonnative judges were English professors whose mother tongue was Chinese. The results showed that native and nonnative judges did show significant differences in their average scores for the 96 contestants. However, such differences did not affect the outcome of the contest concerning 75 % of the semi-final winners. For the remaining 25 % of the semi-final winners upon whom native and nonnative judges disagreed, native judgments weighed more than nonnative ones. The interviewing data indicated that native and nonnative judges differed principally in how they rated the linguistic forms and the content of the contestants' oral performance. Native raters and nonnative raters had apparent different rating criteria with different focuses. Native raters attached more importance to the intelligibility and ignore those phonetic and grammatical mistakes which wouldn't affect comprehension while nonnative raters had low tolerance of linguistic mistakes. The study also found that native raters weighed coherence over relevance of the contestants' speeches while nonnative raters had low tolerance of speakers' irrelevance in the instaneous speech performance.

In this study, we can see that although native raters and non-native raters displayed apparent discrepencies in applying the rating criteria, the interrater reliability was still comparatively high with agreement on 75% of the semi-final winners. But we can also see native raters and nonnative speakers applied different rating criteria with different focuses. Next the paper will give interpretation to the discrepencies by discussing rater variability and rater bais.

## 3. Interpretation and discussion

From the two cited studies, we can see that, in a rating administration, raters may apply not necessarily the same criteria to the examinee and even when they apply the same criteria, their evaluations or judgments on the examinee's oral proficiency may differ. Thus inter-rater inconsistency is an unavoidable source of error. Douglas (1994:134) took it as a source of bias in language use and was less than optimistic about the chances of oral test raters being standardised, claiming that "It is almost axiomatic that no two listeners hear the same message".

The author argues that the systematic error caused by raters can never be eliminated completely, we can only reduce the error to a cetain degree by training raters. The study on rater factors can help us better understand rater variability and rater bias, train raters more effectively and find out ways to modify the scores given by raters.

*3.1 Rater factors*

3.1.1 Rater variability

Raters are not born raters even though they're native speakers. Rater factors, such as their mother tongue, age, gender, educational background, research areas, knowledge about ESL learning and oral ability development, personal character, experience as a rater, whether they have received any training to be raters, etc., will affect their ratings. Among the studies about rater factors, one pilot study was made on the effects of background characteristics of interviewers on the inter-rater reliability of the oral testing procedure for the Senior High School French Program in the Province of Newfoundland of Canada (Flynn, 1991). The research came to the following conclusions: (1) there were significant differences in the ratings of the oral interview; (2) these differences were related to the oral proficiency of the interviewer; (3) these differences were in the areas of assessment of vocabulary, grammar and to some extent fluency. The research also found that in rating the five oral proficiency factors (vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation) respondents rated the most globally viewed factors, comprehension and fluency, as the most important factors. The findings were consistent with the findings of Higgs and Clifford (1982): grammar appears to be a more important factor for those raters whose language proficiency level is higher while vocabulary appears to be a more important factor for less proficient interviewers.

Generally speaking, rater variability can manifest in various ways (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; McNamara, 1996;

Lumley, 2005). Raters may differ (a) in the degree they comply with the scoring rubric, (b) in the way they interpret criteria employed in operational scoring sessions, (c) in the degree of severity and leniency exhibited when scoring examinee performance, (d) in the understanding and use of rating scale categories, or (e) in the degree to which their ratings are consistent across examinees, scoring criteria, and performance tasks. This paper will continue to   discuss rater variability in terms of (c), in the degree of severity and leniency exhibited when scoring examinee performance.

### 3.1.2 Rater bias

The term rater bias refers to rater severity or leniency in scoring, and has been defined as 'the tendency on the part of raters to consistently provide ratings that are lower or higher than is warranted by student performances' (Engelhard, 1994:98). Numerous studies have been made on rater bias pattern which aimed to offer implications in rater training. Wigglesworth (1993:314) found that there was a reduction of rater bias and improvement in internal consistency in subsequent ratings after raters adjusted their ratings according to the feedback of rater bias analysis. However other researchers have found that rater variability persists in spite of extensive rater training and screening (Engelhard, 1992, 1994; Lumley, 2002, 2005; Lumley & McNamara, 1995; McNamara, 1996). Lumley and McNamara (1995:57) noted that although rater training reduces random error and makes raters more self-consistent, it cannot eliminate rater variability. McNamara (1996:127) questioned whether it is even necessary to have complete rater consistency.

The author argues here that rater bias can never be eliminated, because raters differ in age, gender, nationality, life experiences, educational background and research interests as well as personal character. They also differ in their experiences as raters. Therefore their ways of perception also differ. Towards the same utterance input, raters perceive with different focuses and from different perspectives, which lead to discrepancies in their assessing. In other words, raters' interpretation and application of the same rating scale may vary from rater to rater. So we can't require all raters to be absolutely uniform in interpreting and applying criteria and we can't expect to get absolutely the same assessing results from all the raters. An elaborate rating scale may help reduce such differences but can not eliminate it completely. As long as the final scores given by each rater leading to similar assessing results which are within discrepancy tolerance, we can tolerate the discrepancies and still expect to achieve a high interrater reliability. Trained raters can arrive at similar or comparable conclusions/assessments through different emphases. One may concentrate on grammar, another on fluency – or different raters may have dissimilar conceptualizations of fluency.  This is not problematic, especially given that the subcomponents of holistic scales are highly correlated. As mentioned before, in case one, the interrater reliability is 0.972 and in case two, the percentage of total agreement on semi-final winners is 75%.

### 3.2 Rater files and rater training

The significance of the study on rater agreement is to call for studies on rater factors, rater bias and rater training. The study of rater factors and rater bias can give us some clues of the discrepancies in assessing and provide enlightening ways to deal with or compensate for rater bias.

In this paper, the author proposes that rater files which contain rater information including rater bias tendency should be established and kept so that information can be retrieved about the selection of raters, the interpretation as well as the modification of the scores given by raters. For example, in this case study, we can establish a general rater file as follows: see Table 1 (Note: here the personal information of Rater 1 is presumed)

In Table 1, Rater bias tendency coefficient indicates whether a particular rater's rating is above or below the average rating as well as the degree. Suppose in this case study, R1's rater bias tendency coefficient is "-1", which means 1 point below the average score. R3's rater bias tendency coefficient is "+1", which means 1 point above the average (suppose the total score is 5-point). Accordingly, Rater 1's modification coefficient is "+1", which means that the modified score is obtained by adding 1 point to the original score. Rater bias tendency can be found by having raters make assessments on several cases which are representative in terms of examinees and peformance tasks. Suppose this is a general rater file. Considering that rater bias tendency may vary with particular assessing tasks, examinees, etc. therefore, the author advises pilot-on-task assessings before raters assess a particular performance test. Based on the pilot on-task assessings and the general rater file, rater bias tendency and score modification strategy can be worked out.

Another advantage of pilot on-task assessing is that raters can get feedback from the rating analysis and adjust their rating (Wigglesworth, 1993:314) or cloning raters (Alderson, 1991:64). If a rater's pilot assessing is beyond the discrepancy tolerance, we can screen out that rater in the assessing mission.

Rater training cannot eliminate rater bias, but can only make raters more self-consistent. Studies showed that results of rater training may not endure for long after a training session, so the practice of holding a moderation session before each test administration is necessary to allow raters to re-establish an internalized set of criteria for their ratings. Analyses confirm that judge differences survive after trainining, so it seems that at every administration, new calibrations of rater characteristics are required (Lumley & McNamara,1995). Rater training is not a once-for-all matter, it is on-going business. (see appendix)

## 4. Conclusion and suggestion

Based on the above analyses and discussions, we come to the following conclusions:

1) A high inter-rater reliability is not difficult to be achieved.

2) There are apparent discrepencies in raters' interpreting and applying the rating criteria. Rater bias exists and rater factors need to be studied.Rater bias can never be eliminated. Rater bias analysis and rater training can only help reduce the degree of discrepancies.

3) Rater files are helpful in seleting raters, interpreting rating scores and modifying scores.

4) Raters need to receive pre-service,on-service training constantly to maintain their qualification as raters.

Thus this paper gives the following suggestions:

1) The research on oral English testing and assessing need to receive increasing concern in the future.

In 2007, the Education Ministry of China issued new College English Teaching Requirements, which states that the teaching objective of College English teaching is to develop students' integrated English abilities, especially listening and speaking ability. But researches on oral English teaching and assessing are still limited in China, especially to non-English majors. Future research should include oral English teaching, textbook compiling, and increasing the reliability and validity of large-scale oral English testing (Wang Lifei and Zhou Dandan, 2004:8).Therefore, it can be predicted that the study on oral English teaching, testing, assessing and rater training will be in demand in universities of science in China.

2) Establish rater files .

Rater factors and strategies to deal with rater bias need to be studied. Establish rater files which collect rater information concerning age, gender, educational background, research areas, experiences as raters, and especially their rater bias tendency (above or below the average assessing, if possible, the degree of this tendency). Studies should be carried toward strategies to reduce or compensate for rater bias.

3) Raters need to be trained constantly.

Potential raters need to be trained before they are assigned to be raters. To ask potential raters to make assessment on some typical cases is an effective way. Raters need to be trained in terms of applying holistic rating method and an analytical rating method. In the training process, simultaneous reports (think-aloud), immediate retrospection as well as stimulated recall can be adopted. Raters need to be trained constantly and new raters should be trained with experienced raters together to gain some valuable experience. Besides, it's highly advised that pilot on-task training should be carried out before each assessing task. The pilot on-task training can help conform raters to the rating criteria and reduce rater bias, to some extent, cloning raters. In pilot assessing, those potential raters whose ratings are beyond discrepancy tolerance should be considered unqualified for the specific assessing task and be screened out.

4) Raters' making justifications should be incorporated into rater training course.

Raters' making justifications is a helpful and essential way to learn about the process of raters' interpreting and applying the rating scale.

**Appendix**

Rater training at a large North-western American university consists of the following:

1) Completion of a 20 hour rater training program -- raters must achieve 70% agreement overall to move to the next phase, repetition with new sets until 70% is achieved -- 90% of trainees meet the 70% requirement after 20 hours

2) Rating in the August admin as a apprentice rater -- 80% must be achieved -- if achieved the rater is certified, if not rater continues as a practice rater until 80% agreement achieved

3) Regular rater training meetings every month

4) Summer calibration 20 hours every year

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Table 1. General rater file

| Rater ID | Rater Name | Gender | Age | Mother tongue | Educational background/Research area | Years' of being raters | Rater bias tendency coefficient | Score Modification Coefficient |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | | Female | 30 | English | PhD in Applied Linguistics/English teaching methodology | 7 | -1 | +1 |
| R2 | | …… | | | | | | |
| R3……. | | | | | | | | |

# Direct Spoken English Testing Is still a Real Challenge

# to be Worth Bothering About

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**Abstract**

This paper introduces and discusses issues related to the challenge of obtaining more valid and reliable assessment and positive backwash of direct spoken English language performance of students in real-life situations. For this purpose, the paper is divided into four sections. The first section is the introduction to the article. The second part includes presentation and discussion of validity, reliability and practicality as principles of direct spoken English tests. Part three consists of an evaluation of the challenging nature of direct spoken English testing for examiners to deal with. The last section is the conclusion of the paper.

**Keywords**: Direct Spoken English Tests, Nature of direct Spoken English Testing, Challenge in Spoken English Testing, Subjectivity and Time Consuming Nature of Spoken English Testing

## 1. Introduction

An English language test is necessary and valuable not only for a particular aspect of language skill, but for all of them-including speaking English in real life situations. Speaking English in real-life situations is an important skill that should take priority in any language test. To test this ability, teachers need to employ direct tests in the real life contexts so that they can obtain an idea of what candidates would do in real life situations. However, obtaining more valid, reliable and practical measurements of direct spoken English language performance and more positive backwash is still a real challenge for examiners to be worth bothering about since the nature of language testing is connected to social relationships, power, and control (Shohamy, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2004, Kang, 2008).

Testing spoken English directly is still a real challenge, especially when it involves different criteria for assessment that may lead to disagreement between testers themselves, e.g. whether fluency or accuracy is being judged. There may also be difficulty in judging whether only speaking or speaking and listening together. In addition, assessors may face a challenge of how to offer an opportunity for students to "demonstrate their knowledge or skills in the content being assessed." (Young, 2008, p. 2)

Moreover, it is still absolutely impossible to avoid some degree of subjectivity, power and control in assessment regarding, for example, scoring the assessment scale. On the other hand, direct testing has the particular problem of needing the necessary investment of time and money in order to test large numbers of students. However, even when the computer is employed in testing, it is still absolutely impossible to avoid some degree of subjectivity in assessment regarding, for example, scoring the scale and evaluating the importance of items in the part of the course or in real life situations.

## 2. Principles for Spoken English Testing

Validity, reliability and practicality are important principles for defining a spoken English test. Validity can be defined as the extent to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure. Spoken tests (assessments of English language proficiency) are valid when they are able to give a clear idea about the ability of the candidates to communicate, for example, in real life situations. However, regardless of students' level of English proficiency, "all students should have an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge or skills in the content being assessed.   Although students may have different English proficiency classifications, the meaning of their scores on content assessments should be comparable." (Young, 2008, p. 2)

The more features of the real life activity, the easier it will be to translate the performance of the candidate. The face-to-face interview, for example, can help the examiners to determine whether the candidates can speak in real life situations or not. However, direct test formats are usually too time consuming and difficult to administer, especially if there is a large number of candidates. (Weir, 1988) In addition, in general, direct tests are subjective and depend on whether the assessors are good at using grading rubrics/scales and test formats to minimize and reduce subjectivity and disagreement.

Regarding reliability, there are two types. One type is concerned with the examiners. Different examiners are expected to give similar and comparable marks to the same test on two different occasions. (Berkowitz, Wolkowitz, Fitch, and Kopriva, 2000) The second type of reliability is test-retest reliability. It is the ability of a spoken language test to achieve the same result time after time. (Rudner, 2001) Overall, it can be said that a spoken test is a reliable test when it achieves the same result time after time and when its examiners give similar and comparable marks to the same test on different occasions.    So using criteria and training in the use of grading rubrics/scales and test formats to minimize and reduce subjectivity and disagreement are highly important to achieve more reliable results.

Like validity and reliability, practicality in testing spoken language is important. It is about, for example, the amount of time that will be spent on a test as well as the availability of equipment and resources which will be of help for examiners. However, existing resources should not be used beyond its limits. (Weir, 1994) This means that the necessary information about the candidates needs to be obtained in a short time. The more direct the test is such as the face-to-face interview, the more time-consuming and less practical to give a valid assessment. So using criteria and training in the use of grading rubrics/scales, test formats and equipment and resources available are very important with regards to increasing practicality of a direct English language test.

It can be noticed that there is a relationship between validity, reliability and practicality. For example, if a spoken test is valid, it must be reliable as well. In other words, if a spoken test is able to test what the examiner wants it to test, it must also be able to give the same result time after time. When a test gives different results at different times it cannot be valid. However, it is possible for a spoken test to give the same result at different times without being valid. In addition, validity may be threatened by practicality. This means that making direct tests as practical as possible may lead to shorter test time and to them being less direct. Again, using criteria and training in the use of grading rubrics/scales and real-life test formats in their contexts can increase not only validity of the test but also its reliability and practicality.

## 3. Direct Spoken English Testing as a Challenge for Examiners

Direct spoken English testing is a challenge in nearly all aspects, e.g. in the design of tests, the producing of test items, the determining of test scores and the setting of time limits and other administrative procedures. (Pilliner, 1968; Bachman, 1990; Ur, 1996) All of these sources of the challenging nature of direct spoken English testing can affect both reliability and validity of test results. In the following, different sources of challenging will be presented and discussed.

### 3.1 Time

Examiners still face the challenge that each candidate has to be tested in real life time. The oral test should be made as long as is feasible. Sometimes it is impossible to obtain a reliable test in less than 15 minutes, but 30 minutes is quite enough for obtaining all the information necessary for most purposes. (Hughes, 2002) However, time needed depends on the level and the purpose of the test. A time limit of 10-15 minutes is normal in most short/indirect published tests. One issue would be: is it worth for the sake of backwash having a shorter test, or an indirect test?

Direct testing of spoken English is time-consuming and subjective in all its stages. (Hughes, 2002) At the preparation stage, for example, a considerable time is required for the sharing of work as well as the use of mechanical tasks such as checking answer keys. At the test operation stage, it is a challenge for examiners to decide how much time will be spent on carrying out the test procedures and the amount of time that students have to spend on testing. At the final stage, the test improvement stage, making adjustments to the techniques, making systems and monitoring the test all might affect the amount of time that can be spent on testing.

### 3.2 Test formats

There is a range of formats of varying degrees of directness. It includes the more direct type (e.g. the face to face interview) and the more indirect multiple choice pencil and paper test which can be scored by computer. Also, test formats can be classified into three groups formats: indirect formats (e.g. sentence repetition, the mini-situation tape, information transfer); interaction student with student formats (e.g. information gap exercises); and interaction student with examiner or interlocutor formats (e.g. the free interview/conversation, the controlled interview, role play and information gap). (Weir, 1988, 1994)    Each group has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the teacher/assessor should decide which would be most appropriate for the students. In other words, there are still important questions remaining to be answered by examiners such as what principles should underlie good test formats, what type of test formats should be used for large numbers, is it worth having a shorter test format, or an indirect test format, etc.

### 3.3 Real life routines

Keeping interaction in the routines is very important. This means that test formats should include certain routines which reflect real life situations such as expository routines (e.g. description and narration) or evaluative routines (e.g. preferences or the drawing of conclusions). Furthermore, using various improvisation skills, such as checking understanding or expressing agreement or disagreement, plays an important role in interaction, helping, for example, to check specific information or correct mistaken interpretations. (Bygate, 1987)    However, in some situations, there are

thousands of candidates, which means it is an immense task even if only a few minutes is given to test each candidate. This also demands sufficient resources. For example, it may prove very difficult to record thousands of candidates as well as to employ the proper numbers of people to administer the test. It is actually not practical and it demands a large amount of time.

*3.4 Psycho-sociolinguistic relationships*

The practice of direct language testing was expanded to include the importance of context beyond the sentences to appropriate language use. Accordingly, the relationships between the examiner(s) and the candidate(s) are psycho-sociolinguistic relationships connected to power and control. (Shohamy, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2005; Kang, 2008) For example, the tests which are administered by familiar personnel are better than those administered by unfamiliar personnel.  The candidates will also find it easy to speak to people with whom they are familiar or similar in status, e.g. speaking to a single peer is easier than speaking to an unknown authority figure. (Bachman, 1990; Weir, 1994)  In addition, the number of examiners who usually have different questions and ways of communication and understanding can affect the test taker's responses. (Shohamy, 1982; Scott 1986; Bachman; 1990) Also, differences in sex have an impact on the test taker's performance. Women are usually better than men at keeping a conversation going. (Weir, 1994) Furthermore, "speech assessment is sensitive to rater's expectations and social stereotypes." (Kang, 2008, p. 201)

*3.5 Reciprocity*

Reciprocity is a feature of speech which crucially affects the decisions of the examiners that have to be made. (Bygate, 1987) Examiners have to pay attention to their examinees as well as adapting their messages according to their reaction and the type of speech (monologue, conversation and interview). For instance, the candidate will find it easier to carry out a face-to-face conversation than a telephone conversation with an interlocutor in a different room. In addition, the candidate's performance can be affected by features of the language used by the interlocutor, e.g. the rate of utterance, the accent of examiner, the clarity of articulation of the examiner and the length of discourse. Also, each individual factor of raters' characteristics can affect the rating of oral assessments. For example, raters from different language backgrounds (NS/NNS, exposure to NNSs' contact, and prior teaching experience) often have different perceptions on the international testees' accented speech (speech rate, pauses, and stress), and the intercultural intervention (rater training) usually exerts an impact on accentedness rating. (Kang, 2008)

There is some evidence supporting the use of the computer in assessing spoken language performance. Jared points out that using the computer may replace traditional spoken language testing methods. He states that analysis of data, from over 10,000 subjects collected as a result of a series of experiments carried out at 18 colleges and universities in the U.S., Japan and Italy, provides evidence in support of the validity (independent of the learner's other social and cognitive skills) as well as the reliability (split-half correlation of 0.94) of the computer-based scores.

However, in spite of the advantages of computer multimedia, computer programs are still imperfect and they need to be intelligent enough to interact with learners and understand their way of thinking and behaving like their teachers might do. For example, they mainly deal with reading, writing and listening and "even though some speaking programs have been developed recently, their functions are still limited." (Lai & Kritsonis, 2006, p. 4) They need to be able to understand learner's spoken input and evaluate it not only for correctness but also appropriateness (Warschauer, 1996). This shows a fundamental difference in the way humans and computers utilize information (Blin, 1999; Dent, 2001).

*3.6 The optional cut-off technique*

Using the optional cut-off technique which probably leads to saving much time is recommended in implementing direct testing. (Underhill, 1987) It can be used when the learners can be seen not to be taking the same amount of time. In other words, the interviewer can use graded tasks in order of increasing difficulty. When the candidate has clearly failed two or three successive tasks, the interviewer can confirm his/her level by returning to a slightly lower level for another two or three items before ending the test. This technique can be used with several print formats of test such as matching appropriate responses, question and answer and using a picture. However, it is still impossible for examiners to avoid some degree of subjectivity in the use of the cut-off technique, especially with a large number of candidates who need to be tested in a limited time.

Recently, digital formats like BEST Plus assessment formats have been designed to be delivered via computer. (CAL, 2009) The test examiner asks the examinee a question presented on the computer screen, listens to the examinee's response, uses the scoring Rubric to determine the scores for that item, and enters the scores into the computer. The computer then selects the next test item, choosing items most appropriate for the examinee according to the scores entered for previous responses. The examinee might not see the same test twice. However, just like with print formats, it is still impossible to avoid some degree of subjectivity regarding, for example, how much time should be spent on each item of the test, how important is this element in the part of the course or in real life situations, how essential the candidates should know why they are doing the task.

*3.7 Environmental conditions*

Test tasks might be expected to be performed differently under different environmental conditions. (Bachman, 1990) So the test tasks should reflect the target real life situation. "If the candidates are placed in a setting, say for a role play which is not likely to reflect their future language-using situations, validity is impaired to that extent." Weir (1994, p. 38) Furthermore, testing spoken language should be carried out in a quiet room with acoustics. (Hughes, 2002) However, full authenticity of setting is obviously not attainable but settings should be made as realistic as possible (e.g. by creating imagination on the basis of carefully designed rubrics). (Weir, 1994)

*3. 8 Certain arrangements*

Certain arrangements can facilitate testing. For example, the furniture in rooms used for testing can be arranged in a way that facilitates testing, e.g. the chairs of the interviewers can be arranged at an angle or even placed side by side so that testing takes place easily. (Underhill, 1987) In addition, using available resources can also help to facilitate test, such as using reliable equipment which is easy to use for the test requirements. However, although organizing settings and using reliable equipment can facilitate testing, there are still challenging questions remaining to be answered, especially with testing huge numbers of candidates such as is it their responsibility to make certain arrangement or someone else, are examiners aware of the importance of such certain arrangements, do examiners have time to make certain arrangements etc.

*3.9 Test scales*

There are two types of scales for testing spoken language directly. They are the holistic scale and the analytic scale. The holistic scale is a general scale for overall speaking ability. The analytic scale is a detailed scale for several aspects of the skill of speaking such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary etc. However, obtaining valid and reliable scoring is still one of the major difficulties in testing speaking. Examiners still face the challenge to develop a scale that can be applied as objectively as possible. Although the computer can be used for scoring direct testing, it seems that it is still absolutely impossible to avoid some degree of subjectivity in assessment regarding scoring the scale and evaluating the importance of items in the part of the course or in real life situations.

However, each one of the analytic and holistic scales has its own advantages and disadvantages. The choice between them usually depends on the purpose of the testing. The holistic scale is more economical with time when it is carried out by a small, well-knit group at a single site. (Hughes, 2002) The analytic scale is more appropriate if it is to be conducted by a heterogeneous, possibly less well trained group, or in a number of different places such as in the IELTS test. In addition, the analytic scale is essential when diagnostic information is required. Although they can be used together and they can be conducted by more than one person so that their reliability can be checked, examiners still need to be well-trained and familiar with the structures of a test, such as the tasks, the timing and the scoring sheets etc. They also need to be aware of any irrelevant feature of performance. (Hughes, 2002) Furthermore, it is still a challenge for examiners to record the speaking so that the scoring can be done from the tape, especially when they are huge numbers of examinees.

## 4. Conclusion

Obtaining more valid and reliable measurements of direct spoken language performance (language proficiency) and more positive backwash is still a challenge for examiners. It requires considerable time, efforts and familiarity with students' experiences, knowledge and skills in the content being assessed. Assessors/teachers who make a serious commitment to using criteria, training in the use of scales, and identifying and reflecting on their previous experiences, power, control and subjective decisions can plausibly anticipate more valid, reliable and practical assessments. This would also be a great opportunity to invite students to become self-assessors themselves. This cooperative practice of testing/assessment would enhance student motivation, confidence, and achievement.

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# Study on the Features of English Political Euphemism

# and its Social Functions

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**Abstract**

Political euphemism is a tool for political leaders to control information transmission. Based on some examples, this paper begins with a summary of three features which distinguish political euphemism from others. Then, it discusses its two social functions based on Austin's Speech Act Theory: 1. as political leaders' tool, political euphemism plays the role of hiding the truth and legalizing wrong behaviors; 2. it influences people's sense of right and wrong as well as their understanding of the objective world, hence succeeding in persuading them. Such a linguistic phenomenon provides another proof that language is not only a reflection of the objective world but a process of social construction.

**Keywords:** Political euphemism, Social Functions, Feature, Speech act

## 1. Introduction

Euphemism, a common phenomenon in human language use, has attracted much attention home and abroad. With the arrival of foreign linguistic theories in China since 1980s, Chinese scholars have published a large number of essays and books which focus on euphemism from different perspectives and systematically summarize the causes of its production, way of composition, classification, and pragmatic principles of composition as well as its social functions. (Shu, 1995, p17; Liu, 2000, p36) Actually, political euphemism has always been a point of penetration for foreign political linguists to evaluate and criticize political discourse. In the recent years, with the establishment of the selected English newspaper reading course in many Chinese colleges, English political euphemism began to attract people's attention. However, it is mainly confined to its disguising function (Pan, 2004, p85), leaving its influences on people's thoughts and ideology untouched. This paper begins with an analysis on the features of political euphemism and explores its two main social functions--- disguising or cheating function and persuasive function with Austin's Speech Act Theory. Overall, this paper aims at further revealing the essential features of political euphemism, expanding people's vision in euphemism and revealing the relationship among language, thought and existence to some extent.

## 2. Features of Political Euphemism

Euphemism is defined in different ways from the perspectives of pragmatics and style: Hongrui Wen (2002) once quoted several representative definitions, which have it in common that euphemism is a replacement of ordinary expressions with propitious or exaggerated ones. Political euphemism is created in political life and serves political purposes. Generally speaking, it is a tool for political participants to hide scandals, disguise the truth, guide public thoughts when discussing social issues or events. In spite of some common features political euphemism shares with others, it has three typical features.

### 2.1 Greater Degree of Deviation from its Signified

According to Swiss linguist Saussure, language signs are a combination of the signifier, the phonetic forms of language and the signified, objects in existence represented by linguistic forms. Due to the lack of direct or logical relations between the two, they have a discretionary relationship with each other, making it possible to create euphemism by replacing the signifier. Because euphemism is just created by transforming the signifier to enlarge the association distance between the signifier and the signified, euphemism meanings stay relative to their former zero-degree ones (Xu, 2002, p7). Although euphemism and its former zero-degree signifier refer to the same signified, political euphemism is different from those commonly used euphemistic forms in order to avoid death and other physical phenomena in that it deviates greatly from the meaning expressed by its former signifier, or even a complete distortion. For example, Former US President Reagan once named the 10-warhead intermediate-range missile as "peacekeeper"; some later political

participants named their attack as "active defense"; they even replaced "recession" with "negative growth" because it sounded offensive to the ear. It is quite obvious that these expressions are not a simple replacement of the former zero-degree signifier, but quite opposite meanings to their literal meanings, just like replacing "black" with "white". We might as well mark euphemism's deviation degree with a range from 1 to 10, within which a greater number refers to a greater degree of deviation. In this case, the above mentioned political euphemism expressions should be marked with 10 while some ordinary expressions such as "overweight" and "fat" can only be marked as 1.

*2.2 More Vague Meanings*

George Owell pointed out two characteristics of political discourse in *Politics and the English Language* (1946), that is, the obsolescence and vagueness of figure of speech. Euphemism, characterized by replacing direct expressions with implicative, obscure and vague ones, plays a quite essential role in demystifying the connotation of political discourse when serving political purposes. Some commonly employed demystifying methods in political euphemism include replacing specific meanings with general ones, replacing hyponyms with superordinates and replacing derogatory meanings with neutral or even commendatory ones. For instance, people often refer to the atomic bombs used in Hiroshima as "the gadget", "the device", "the thing" or other vague meanings. When talking about American army's invasion into Grenada in 1983, President Reagan was quite dissatisfied with the word "invasion" used by the journalists, instead, he expressed it as "a rescue mission", glorifying their military invasion as their help offer to other countries. Similarly, US air attacks in Vietnam and Libya were called "air operation; President Bush also glorifying their military attack to Iraq with some neutral and general expressions such as "military operation" or "disarm" in this speech delivered on the very day they made war against Iraq in 2003.

*2.3 Strong Characteristic of Times*

Euphemism is the language reflection of Social culture, (Peng, 1999. p66) therefore changes in social development will propel those in language. In each international vicissitude, political euphemism will be booming. Due to US's important role in international politics as well as its dynamic domestic politics and economy, rich soil is provided for the creation of political euphemism. For example, from US economic decline are "recession", "disinflation" and "negative growth" created, hence giving birth to some euphemistic expressions such as "downsize" or "workforce adjustment". After Watergate Scandal, quite a few euphemistic expressions were produced to hide such political scandal. In addition, military actions are also an extension from politics. It is said that war has brought about not only death and destruction but new euphemistic expressions because they will make death sound less horrible (Page, 2003). US Department of Defense named their air attack in Vietnam as "air support" and "protective action", their destruction over Vietnamese villages as "pacification program" and those homeless refugees as "ambient non-combat personnel. Similarly, deaths and injuries caused by their bombardment over other nations were expressed as "collateral damage". It is no wonder that English Teachers' Council of US once awarded the Best Political Euphemism Award to its Department of Defense.

Besides, its characteristic of times can also be reflected in the variation in the signifier of the same objective phenomenon with time. Let's take the different euphemisms of military attack in different periods as an example. In 1950s, Truman described Korean War as "police action"; in 1960s and 1970s, Vietnam War was called "Vietnam Conflict" by US; in 1983, US invasion into Grenada was said to be "a rescue mission" instead of "incursion"; its invasion into Panama was also called "Operation Just Cause" and Bush Government said Iraqi War beginning in March, 2003 as "Operation Iraqi Freedom".

Inside the language system, such constant changes with time evolve from the relationship between the signifier and signified mentioned in 2.1. Although there is no relation between linguistic signs and their signified, people tend to relate euphemism to its signified after it has been used for a period. As a result, the former vagueness and sense of distance disappear and euphemistic color fades away. Consequently, politicians will rack their brains to find alternative expressions. However, the production of a large number of political euphemisms can find its root in profound social reasons, which will be analyzed in two aspects as follows:

**3. Social Functions of Political Euphemism**

*3.1 Speech Act Theory and Social Functions of Political Euphemism*

It is shown in the above analysis that political euphemism is different from others expressing physical phenomena or used in other fields such as in career because it is equipped with obvious political language characteristics. Actually, political language is neither romantic as literature nor precise as that in foreign trade, but purpose-oriented (Tian, 2002. p24). In the following part, let's look at how political euphemism performs illocutionary act and perlocutionary act with Austin's Speech Act Theory. Austin claims that speech performs three speech acts simultaneously, including locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act (He, 1997, pp85-86). This theory provides theoretical support for us to reveal the social functions of political euphemism. However, with individual listeners as his subject, Austin mainly focused his attention on the function of speech act verbs in the three levels of speech act. Here in this paper, we try to analyze this linguistic phenomenon from a wider perspective with political leaders (including governmental officials

serving them) and public people as the two sides of the communication. We find that implication is an important part of euphemism in addition to its narrative and signified functions.

### 3.2 Illocutionary Act--- Political Euphemism's Disguising and Deceptive Function

Political euphemism is an effective tool for political leaders to control the quantity and quality of information transmission, with which some disgraceful behaviors or motivations will be glorified or hidden, hence avoiding public accusal. For example, US Ex-President Nixon and his partners called their overhearing spying in Watergate Scandal as "intelligence gathering" and their lie telling as "less than truthful" and "prevaricate". Obviously, such trivialized expression is to smooth out the bad influences they have exerted. US Government once expressed their nuclear experiment in South Pacific as "operation sunshine". It is widely known that atomic bomb experiments are mainly intended to test the extensiveness and effectiveness of its execution, but such a euphemistic name hides their nature. It is impossible for people who are uninformed of it to associate such a beautiful name with terrible nuclear weapon. In the reports about US military attacks to other nations in recent years, people hardly find expressions as "surprise attack". Instead, some other expressions such as "preemptive strikes" or "surgical strikes" are employed to add a color of justice. Actually, all these are defensive expressions to hide their illegal attack to others.

It doesn't go far to compare politicians to euphemism masters because they skillfully deliver their lies with their own language. 2500 years ago, Chinese militarist Sunzi summarized military behaviors as "nothing is too deceitful in war", which seems also adaptable to politicians. George Orwell (1946) pointed out straightforwardly that political language was designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.

### 3.3 Perlocutionary Act---Political Euphemism's Persuasive Function

Lakoff (1990) claims that politics is language and language is politics. Political euphemism is similar to political propaganda in that both aim at persuading and influencing the public. It has been a long time since linguists realized language is not only for ideogram or reflecting social culture but for participating social events and constructing social relationship. Actually, it is a kind of social practice and an intervention. Based on the above facts, Berger and Luckmann (1967) have long before pointed out the important role of language in the construction of social reality.  Although it doesn't change the signified things in existence, it really changes its conceptual connotation because sometimes people's learning of a concept or a meaning is based on their knowledge about words (Hudson, 2000, pp92-93). Political leaders try to shape people's recognition and knowledge of the world with the use of euphemism, hence influencing their view of world and intervening their knowledge of the world and sense of right and wrong.

It is stated by critical linguists that language is not a true reflection of reality. While helping people to know about the objective world, language also imposes on them a set of extremely subjective classification on behalf of their group interests, which is often used to deceive people without detection (Dong, 2000, p25). The influences exerted by political euphemism are not immediate but subtle and potential, hence planting illusive concepts into people's minds and changing them into facts accepted by these people.

## 4. Conclusion

Political euphemism is not just a simple rhetoric replacement of the former zero-degree signifier. Instead, it has some special characteristics which distinguish it with euphemistic expressions in other fields. Its production reflects political leaders' motivation to hide the truth and shift public attention off it. By using such expression, they attempt to control people's learning about the world as well as information transmission. Therefore, when reading political discourse, we should be alert to some potential political purposes hidden in euphemism. Especially in some courses such as selected English newspaper reading, some analyses on political euphemism should be made to enhance students' capacity in understanding newspapers, improve their appreciation ability of English and learn about the way that language serve political purposes.

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# Is "Absorb Knowledge" An Improper Collocation?

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**Abstract**

Collocation is practically very tough to Chinese English learners. The main reason lies in the fact that English and Chinese belong to two distinct language systems. And the deep reason is that learners tend to develop different metaphorical concept in accordance with distinct ways of thinking in Chinese. The paper, taking "absorb knowledge" as an example, intend to explore how to present the potential collocation patterns of "knowledge"in the learner's dictionary for Chinese learners, based on a series of search results of BROWN and LOB as well as CLEC, by comparing the usual combinational patterns of "knowledge"of Chinese learners and English native speakers.

**Keywords:** Collocation, Corpus, Metaphor

After having mastered the basic grammar of a foreign language, "the key to determine whether the language a learner is using is native-like or not rests on collocations." (Yang Huizhong, 2002, p27-28) Collocation is practically a hot potato for Chinese English learners. Learners are constantly under the influence of mother tongue which can be reflected in combinational habit in the two different languages. In fact, there are many collocations which sound a quite reasonable and sensible collocation for Chinese learners, but many linguists and lexicographers believe them unaccepted and erroneous. Taking *absorb knowledge* as an example, this paper explores into English corpus BROWN, LOB and Chinese Learners' English Corpus (CLEC), compare the collocational tendency of knowledge of Chinese learners and English-native speakers, combine with the information of contemporary dictionaries to review and analyze *absorb* and *knowledge*, on the basis of which to explore the combination tendency of *knowledge* and the way to optimize this information in learners' dictionaries so as to help learners to acquire correct collocational forms.

## 1. Is "*absorb knowledge*" Overused by Chinese Learners?

Once in a lecture Professor Wu Jihong put forward an idea: "*overuse* here refers to the learners' overuse of figurative meaning in the combination, like the collocation *absorb knowledge*.

Chinese word *XISHOU* has a higher metaphorical degree than its English peer *absorb*. Unaware of this, learners tend to make such mistake as overusing figurative meaning when producing collocations. Figurative meaning is also called metaphorical meaning." In other words, according to what Professor Wu holds, learners lack in metaphorical thoughts and have insufficient knowledge of the non-equivalence between *XISHOU* and *absorb* so that they often produce improper collocations like *absorb knowledge*.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p5) said that "most of our thoughts are metaphorical, that is, to understand one thing in terms of another. Metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, most important of all, but also a cognitive phenomenon of human beings and in essence it is a basic perspective and cognitive way in which people understand the surroundings. Metaphor refers to the way people choose to look on things and perceive reality." "Different languages have distinctive metaphors, and thus reflecting various conceptual system." (Chen Jiaxu, 2007, p85) It can be said that the languages we are using contains elements of metaphor in the form of metaphors. Metaphors reflect ways of thinking of language users in terms of language while differences between languages usually display in real language use.

Professor Wu's idea is fairly novel and enlightening but as for whether the collocation *absorb knowledge* is improper or not, so far the author cannot draw a conclusion. In order to investigate the problem, we need to start from the real language in use.

## 2. Comparison of the Collocation Pattern *verb+knowledge*

Here is the result of the combinational pattern *verb+knowledge* found in CLEC by means of wordsmith, only 10 words with high frequency chosen, as shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here.

Among all the verbs listed in the table, except that words like *study, teach, grasp, go over, know, master* are not included in English Collocation Dictionary, the rest are considered accepted collocators of *knowledge*. In Oxford English Collocation Dictionary, verbs which can collocate with *knowledge* include *acquire, gain, have, demonstrate, flaunt, parade, show off, test, apply, share, spread, broaden, extend, improve, increase, deny*, etc. English Collocation Dictionary is produced by Japanese linguists, reflecting the collocations of English words as a second or foreign

language. Oxford English Collocation Dictionary, edited by English native speakers, though incomparable with English Collocation Dictionary in size, is based on native English corpus BNC. In this sense, Oxford English Collocation Dictionary provides native collocations for learners, which can help them acquire the native English combinational patterns.

A lot of verb collocators of knowledge appearing in CLEC reflect the combinational habit of Chinese learners. In Chinese,*ZHI* refers to learning or knowledge. Knowledge can come from books as well as pass down from ancestors. In Chinese books are usually compared to teachers, representing the sources of knowledge. China is a country which honor teachers and respect morals and knowledge should learn from teachers so in Chinese there is a collocation *QIUXUE*, also *QIUZHI* Chinese learners transfer it into English and create collocations like *learn/ study knowledge, teach/ give knowledge, grasp/master knowledge*, etc. In the Corpus of Contemporary American English constructed by Mark Davies from Brigham Young University, the most frequent collocator of *knowledge* is *impart*, followed by *acquire*. Its other most remarkable verb collocators go to *synthesize, possess, accumulate, gain*, etc. In other native English corpus like BROWN, LOB, the most frequent verb collocator of *knowledge* is *have*. Other collocators only appear once or twice. In the two corpuses, all the common collocations used by Chinese learners do not appear in CLEC, but there is one point worth noticing, in LOB there is one sentence:

But pointed out that the E31 185 capacity to absorb technical knowledge differed from the hard realism E31 186 of routine catering

The author also found 18 times of *absorb…knowledge* in Corpus of American English, seen in Table 2:

Among them, except 4 which are unable to explain *absorb* can collocate with *knowledge*, the rest 14 examples fully exemplify the real existence of collocation *absorb knowledge* in native English corpuses, especially in American English.

What's more, in order to make a parallel comparison the author made other exploration of other verbs which Chinese learners believe to be able to collocate with *knowledge*. The results are shown in Table 3,

If *learn/ teach knowledge* is not native collocation in English, it is easier to understand, not only because they are not combined with *knowledge* in English but also because there are no similar examples found in all dictionaries. As for *absorb knowledge*, it has received some attention in learners' dictionaries such as Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary and the alike. Furthermore, once participating in an online discussion section of ESL forums on the website of **Using English.com** on whether *study/ learn knowledge* is correct collocation, the author found that almost all participants agreed that knowledge is not the object of study, but the result. Thus, if to comment on whether *absorb knowledge* is correct or not, the author believes that we should be cautious to make the judgment.

### 3. Investigation of Collocations of *absorb* and *knowledge* in Dictionaries

First we compare meanings of *absorb* and *knowledge* in two authoritative monolingual learner's dictionaries: *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE) 4th edition, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (OALD) 4th edition, *A Multifunction English-Chinese Dictionary* and *The New Century Multifunctional English-Chinese Dictionary*. In OALD 4th, *absorb* has one sense meaning "take (sth.) in; suck up". It indicates that whatever things, concrete or abstract, can be used together with the word. In LDOCE 4th, *information* is directly informed to be its potential object. And the headword *knowledge* in the same dictionary is defined "the facts, skills and understanding that you have gained through learning or experience; information that you have about a particular situation, event, etc". In other words, *knowledge* can be a potential collocator to *absorb*.

Then we investigate the presentation of *absorb* collocations in 11 learners' dictionaries, centering on comparison of examples and other information. The results of investigation are shown in Table 4.

Through the investigation, we find there are no direct examples to show the existence of *absorb knowledge* except in the fourth edition of Oxford Advanced Dictionary(OALD4) and A Multifunction English-Chinese Dictionary. The other English monolingual dictionaries show in examples that words like *information* can be objects of *absorb*. Also, in Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (LDOELC) and OALD4 labels are utilized to suggest that *absorb knowledge* belongs to figurative usage, that is, metaphorical use.

Now let's turn to the collocations of *knowledge* in learners' dictionaries. Generally, definitions and examples in dictionaries are most possible to instruct the combinational patterns of a lemma. Take LDOCE4. The common sense of *knowledge* is the facts, skills, and understanding that you have gained through learning or experience. And the given Chinese equivalents are *ZHISHI* and *XUEWEN*. Through the definition, users are told that when *knowledge* takes up this meaning, then the potential verb collocator is *gain*. What's more, from the given examples users can know it often appears before prepositions like *of* or *about*. *Knowledge* is also considered as a near synonym of *information*, which appears in the fourth sense, saying "information that you have about a particular situation, event, etc". In this sense, it often co-occurs with verbs or verb phrases like *deny, come to* or *bring something to*.

One of the most remarkable features of Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary (CALD) is the emphasis of lexical collocations. In this dictionary, readers can find collocation column of *knowledge*, in which the listed verb collocators include *acquire, gain, have* and so on. When collocated with these words, *knowledge* means "understanding of or information about a subject which has been obtained by experience or study, and which is either in a person's mind or possessed by people generally".

Comparatively speaking, *acquire* or *gain knowledge* is more common to English native speakers. Though *absorb knowledge* is not as common as *acquire knowledge*, it is not too hard to understand. It's because English word *absorb* shares much common in semantics with Chinese word *XISHOU*. One sense of *absorb* is "to take sth. into the mind and learn or understand it", and *XISHOU* means "to distill instructive elements".(seen on the website of Han Dian) "To distill" is based on "to understand knowledge".

## 4. Exploration of Combinational Pattern of *knowledge* in Learners' Dictionary

The difficulties learners meet when learning English, besides linguistic reasons, mainly originate from Chinese and English thinking pattern difference.( He Yihui and Hu Wenfei, 2007, p85) Generally, if there are similar collocations in English and Chinese, the mother tongue has positive transference and helps the acquisition of English collocations. If not, the mother tongue exerts negative transference and thus interfere acquisition. However, due to the enormous difference between thinking patterns, English and Chinese usually have few complete-equivalent vocabularies.

For Chinese learners, the acquisition of collocations is still a tough problem. In order to warn learners of the combinational patterns of *knowledge*, the dictionary can adopt collocation column as in CALD but the content shown or displayed in the column should be arranged in the light of the characteristics of Chinese learners. The advised presentation of collocations is shown in the following box:

> WORDS THAT GO WITH *knowledge*
>
> v+ knowledge (Note: *learn/teach/study/grasp/master knowledge* are all considered Chinglish combinations, which are really used by English native speakers.)
>
> **gain/acquire/have** knowledge
>
> deny (all) knowledge **of** sth

In general, it is essential for learners' dictionaries to adopt extrovert methods to attract users' or learners' attention to collocations which differ greatly due to different ways of thinking. By doing so, learners' dictionaries can play an effective role in guiding their studies so that mistakes like *learn knowledge* which are affected by mother tongue can be avoided.

## 5. Conclusion

Compared with *learn knowledge*, *absorb knowledge* cannot be regarded as collocational mistakes, which has been fully explained by native English corpus. Whether the advised presentation of *knowledge* in the learners' dictionaries really is really helpful to learners' acquisition of the combinational forms of knowledge or how much help it can provide need experiments and further studies.

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Table 1. the combinational pattern *verb+knowledge* found in CLEC by means of wordsmith

| Level / v+knowledge | st2 | st3 | st4 | st5 | st6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | learn | learn | learn | learn | have |
| 2 | have | have | study | get | learn |
| 3 | go over | get | get | have | get |
| 4 | study | use | have | master | gain |
| 5 | teach | know | improve | enrich | enlarge |
| 6 | give | study | master | use | improve |
| 7 | grasp | master | use | gain | enrich |
| 8 | | increase | know | broaden | master |
| 9 | | put…into practice | give | | |
| 10 | | teach | grasp | | |

Table 2. 18 times of absorb…knowledge in Corpus of American English

| 1991 | FIC | BkGen:TreasureSun | attend a college. Most lawyers apprentice themselves to another lawyer until they **absorb** the **knowledge** they need. If I hadn't been a woman, my uncle would have |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992 | MAG | American Spectator | appear to grasp how spontaneously evolved social institutions like the family **absorb** and retain **knowledge** and wisdom through the ages, an ignorance typical of the left to which she |
| 1992 | ACAD | Arabstudies | the culture-wide appreciation for learning. Education furthers the national capacity to acquire scientific **knowledge** and to **absorb** new technology. At the most basic level, it is a |
| 1995 | ACAD | PerspPolSci | United States that with democracy all around them, students will **absorb** the necessary **knowledge** and the appropriate views without explicit teaching or discussion. In newer democracies, " |
| 1995 | ACAD | AfricanArts | donning the carvings, the younger men would acquire power; they would absorb knowledge stored in the masks. # These ideas may seem somewhat quaint, but they |
| 1999 | MAG | Inc. | they add to the bottom line but for their willingness to **absorb** and share **knowledge**. By taking time when it comes to hiring and training, willfully shutting out |
| 1999 | NEWS | NewYorkTimes | in a stress-filled and windowless kitchen in return for the chance to **absorb** the **knowledge** and mysterious skills of a star chef, and maybe even bask in reflected glory |
| 2000 | ACAD | Education | resistance to change, inhibited communication and possibly even an inability to **absorb** new **knowledge**. Therefore, bad management often weakens the organization through its insensitivity towards and lack |

| 2001 | MAG | USAToday | progressives " long have believed that many children shouldn't be pushed to **<u>absorb knowledge</u>** beyond their limited innate capacities, and that they are better off with teachers who |
|------|-----|----------|-------|
| 2001 | MAG | Newsweek | 'America is under attack.' I'm trying to **<u>absorb</u>** that **<u>knowledge</u>**. I have nobody to talk to. I'm sitting in the midst of |
| 2001 | ACAD | MusicEduc | of their own and other cultures' symbol systems so that they can share **<u>knowledge</u>**, **<u>absorb</u>** wisdom, and gain the power to use these symbols in ways that |
| 2003 | ACAD | SocialStudies | , 445). Because there are already complaints about the vast amount of **<u>knowledge</u>** to **<u>absorb</u>** in the world history course, it is doubtful that history educators or |
| 2004 | ACAD | AmerIndianQ | eighteen-ceremony ecological calendar, so while learning the language, students also **<u>absorb</u>** some **<u>knowledge</u>** of Aztec history and culture. These ceremonies deal with rain, germination, ripening |
| 2005 | MAG | RollingStone | the only things consistent about her career is her ability to **<u>absorb</u>** and incorporate **<u>knowledge</u>** at an alarming rate, allowing her to stay one step ahead of critics, |
| 2005 | MAG | Smithsonian | into how much he cared about the underprivileged around the world and how much **<u>knowledge</u>** he could **<u>absorb</u>** and retain. I knew then I would have a friend and |
| 2005 | MAG | MusicEduc | constructivism, one theme seems to prevail: students do not simply **<u>absorb</u>** conceptual **<u>knowledge</u>**; they actively construct it by combining and reorganizing preexisting bodies of knowledge. (n1 |
| 2006 | ACAD | ABAJournal | it will be the liability system that gives them the incentive to **<u>absorb</u>** new **<u>knowledge</u>** into their practice and change their behavior. " # McLeod shares that view. |
| 2006 | ACAD | CollegeStud | or that those with positive attitudes are more likely to seek and **<u>absorb</u>** the **<u>knowledge</u>** was not explored. However, Engeland et al (2002) found that attitudes |

Table 3. other verbs which can collocate with knowledge

| CONTEXT | TOT | ALL | % | MI |
|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|
| LEARN | 83 | 47981 | 0.17 | 0.79 |
| TEACH | 63 | 21048 | 0.30 | 1.58 |
| ABSORB | 18 | 3544 | 0.51 | 2.34 |
| MASTER | 22 | 20814 | 0.11 | 0.08 |
| GRASP | 20 | 5319 | 0.38 | 1.91 |
| GIVE | 100 | 134844 | 0.07 | -0.44 |
| KNOW | 140 | 564684 | 0.02 | -2.02 |

Table 4. the presentation of *absorb* collocations in 11 learners' dictionaries

| forms / dictionaries | EXAMPLE | SENSE | LABEL | OTHERS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary (CALD) | it's hard to absorb so much information. | to understand facts or ideas completely and remember them | / | / |
| Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (LDOELC) | So many new ideas! It's all rather too much for me to absorb all at once. | to take or suck in | figurative | / |
| Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE) 4th Edition | I haven't really had time to absorb everything that he said. | to read or hear a large amount of new information and understand it | / | / |
| Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (MEDAL) | 1) Over the centuries, they gradually absorbed Islamic ideas about design and architecture. 2) We had to absorb a lot of new information very quickly. | 1) to allow ideas, methods etc to become part of your own way of thinking or culture 2) to learn and understand new facts, so that they become part of your knowledge | / | assimilate as its synonym |
| Collins COBUILD Advanced Learners' Dictionary (CCALD) | Too often he only absorbs half the information in the manual. | If you absorb information, you learn and understand it. | / | digest and assimilate as its synonyms |
| Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD) 7th Edition | It's a lot of information to absorb all at once. | to take sth. Into the mind and learn or understand it | / | take in as its synonym |
| Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD) 6th Edition | It's a lot of information to absorb all at once. | to take sth. Into the mind and learn or understand it | / | / |
| Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (OALD) 4th Edition | Clever children absorb knowledge easily. | take (sth.) in; such up | figurative | / |
| A Multifunction English-Chinese Dictionary | absorb knowledge | xishou, lijie (zhishi deng) | / | / |
| English Etymological Dictionary and Thesaurus | / | / | / | using synonym association column (in which some abstract concept like knowledge, idea, etc can be its object.) |
| The New Century Multifunctional English-Chinese Dictionary | She absorbed everything in the book. | jiqu (zhishi deng) | / | / |

# The Motivation of L2 Learners: Does It Decrease with Age?

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the motivation of a heterogeneous group of students studying English as a foreign language at the International School in Tripoli area. The aim of the study was to find out the extent to which various factors affect students' motivation and achievement in second/foreign language learning particularly as they enter the senior high school. The research also looked into the temporal dimension of L2 motivation to see if the students' motivation changes as they enter the senior high school. One hundred and forty four students from thirty five nationalities learning English and five teachers participated in the completion of the questionnaire surveys. Twenty students and three teachers took part in the semi-structured interviews. Data were drawn from students' examination results and a combined quantitative-qualitative approach in which student and teacher questionnaire surveys were followed by a round of student and teacher interviews. The results of the *'Student's Motivation Questionnaire'* show that L2 motivation in the sample decreases with age: The results of one-way analyses of variance across the five age groups investigated show that the older learners tend to score significantly lower on the motivational scales and the interviews data gives further support to this finding. There are a number of influential factors that affect learners' motivation: in particular the role of the teacher was seen fundamental in determining the attitude to the language and in supplying motivation. Other external factors include aspects related to the learning context.

**Keywords:** Motivation, L2 learners, Foreign language, Learning context, Second Language

## 1. Introduction

It has been commonly accepted that the learners' achievement in learning a second/foreign language is related to their level of motivation to learn the language. Motivation is a kind of internal drive that encourages a learner to pursue a course of action and is responsible for initiating the learning and later the driving force to sustain the learning process over the long and arduous years it takes to learn a language. It is believed that without sufficient motivation no other factor on its own can ensure student achievement (Dörnyei, 2001).

The first three decades of L2 motivation research saw a considerable amount of empirical investigations which were mostly inspired by Robert Gardner and his associates in Canada applying versions of a standardised motivation test. The results of this research have demonstrated that attitudes and motivation are related to how well individuals learn a second/foreign language. By the early 1990s the study of motivation took a turning point following a call to arms by Crookes & Schmidt (1991) to explore various directions in which the social psychological construct of L2 motivation could be further developed. As a result of this, the 1990s saw an influx of L2 research that extended and covered a variety of issues, particularly cognitive and situation-specific variables.

Amongst some of the researchers who have made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of L2 motivation are Williams & Burden (1997). These authors reviewed a substantial number of general motivational theories as well as some recent research on L2 motivation. The different aspects of this research have been presented in the form of a framework of motivational factors.

Similarly, Dörnyei (1994) attempted to integrate the various components of motivation and at the same time focus on the components that would be applicable to foreign language learning contexts as opposed to second language learning contexts. He drew up an extended motivational framework which was similar in nature but broader to that of Crookes & Schmidt's (1991) approach. The tripartite division of the framework was also based on the empirical results of Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, (1994) classroom study in Hungary in which a tripartite L2 motivation construct emerged comprising integrativeness, linguistic self-confidence and the appraisal of the classroom environment. Using this as the basis, Dörnyei developed a more general framework of L2 motivation. This framework consists of three relatively distinct levels.

The first level is The Language Level which comprises the Integrative Motivational Subsystem and the Instrumental Motivational Subsystem. The second level of this motivational construct is The Learner Level, which involves various cognitive aspects of motivation which form part of the 'baggage' that a person brings to the learning process. The third level of motivation is the Learning Situation Level which involves three sub-categories of motivational components.

They are: 1. Course-Specific Motivational Components, 2. Teacher-Specific Motivational Components and 3. Group-Specific Motivational Components.

A number of researchers have found that there is a strong connection between the teacher and the learners' motivation, achievement, negative feelings and effort (Chambers, 1998; Clément et al , 1994; Gardner et al, 2004; Mihaljević, 1990, 1992, 1994; Nikolov, 1999; Ozek & Williams, 1999; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden & Al-Baharna, 2001; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2009; Hardré & Sullivan, 2008). The results of these studies highlight the fact that "the teacher's level of enthusiasm and commitment is one of the most important factors that affect the learners' motivation" (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 130).

Furthermore, other external factors such as the course, teaching methods, instructional materials, influences of family, friends, learning activities and even individual tasks can affect the learners' motivation, achievement, effort, and develop positive or negative feelings (Chambers, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994, 2002; Dörnyei, 2008; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar & Shohamy, 2004; Egbert, 2003; Ellis, 1985; Inbar, Shohamy & Donitsa-Schmidt, 1999, 2001; Julkunen, 1990, 1994, 2001; Mihaljević, 1990, 1994; Ozek & Williams, 1999; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams et al, 2001).

A review of the literature on motivation in an educational context reveals that even though research has been carried out on student motivation, only a few studies have been conducted analysing the dynamics of L2 motivational change in educational institutions (Chambers, 1999; Williams & Burden, 1999; Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002; Tachibaba, Matsukawa & Zhong, 1996; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic, 2004) despite the fact that the learners' interest needs to be sustained over the many years it takes to learn a language. It appears logical therefore, that research on the temporal dimension of L2 motivation is important to our understanding of the different influential factors that affect learners throughout the lengthy process of their study.

Since the results of the above studies suggest that the motivation of learners in school contexts declines with age and that it is influenced by external factors related to the teacher and course-specific motivational components outlined in Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation, the objectives of the current study were to find out: (a) the extent in which various factors affect students' motivation and achievement in second/foreign language learning particularly as they enter the senior high school; (b) to carry out a cross-comparison of the results obtained by the questionnaire with those of the interviews and (c) to obtain additional information on how students motivation can be enhanced.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were students and teachers from the 'International School of the Martyrs' in the Tripoli area. One hundred and forty four students from thirty five nationalities learning English participated in the questionnaire survey. The participants were selected from five different levels: Grades 6 – 10 (See Table 1). All the participants in these levels who were present on the days the questionnaire was administered took part in the completion of this instrument. The students' grades, gender and language proficiency level are summarised in Table 1.

In all, five teachers participated in the completion of the 'Teacher's Evaluation of Student's Motivation Questionnaire', two from the elementary school and three from the high school. The teachers are from three ethnic backgrounds: European, North American and Indian.

There were twenty students (8 males and 12 females) that took part in the semi-structured interviews. They constitute four ethnic backgrounds: Europeans (6); Asians (1); Arabs (11) and Africans (2). Eight students were selected from Grade 8, six from Grade 9 and six from Grade 10. Students were chosen according to the following criteria:

• They had completed the student questionnaire.

• They were sufficiently talkative to allow for the gathering of rich data.

• They were available at the time of the interviews.

Three teachers participated in the semi-structured interviews. They were from three ethnic backgrounds: European, North American and Indian. The criteria that was used for teacher selection was based on which levels the teachers had taught.

### 2.2 Instruments

Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In all a total of four research instruments were devised for this study: a questionnaire for students, a questionnaire for teachers, one round of semi-structured interviews for students and a semi-structured interview for teachers. In addition to this the achievement scores of the first-term examination were provided by each class teacher.

### 2.3 Procedures

The investigation consisted of four stages. For the initial stage a Student's Motivation Questionnaire was administered

to all students in Grades 6-10 during their regular class time. The questionnaire consisted of 101 statements, questions and bipolar adjectives, which required the students to respond to the items by simply evaluating a statement/question on a five-point Likert scale or marking their responses on seven-point semantic differential scales. In addition, two open-ended statements provided the students with the opportunity to include their own ideas on ways which they thought could help them learn these languages. The questionnaire also sought to obtain background information about the students. The main part of the questionnaire consisted of 101 items about the learning of English, representing 19 motivational variables. The number of items for each variable varied from two to fourteen. Table 2 presents the main variables that were used in this study and number of items that addressed them.

For the second stage of data elicitation the 'Teacher's Evaluation of Student's Motivation Questionnaire' was devised for the teachers who taught the classes that took part in this study. This instrument consisted of three items which focused on the teachers' perception of (a) the motivation of the students to learn these languages; (b) how active they were in class; (c) how conscientious they were towards their homework assignments. For each item the teachers were asked to respond by marking an option on a 7 point-semantic differential scale. The aim of this instrument was to collect performance data about the students and, based on this, to select students to participate in the subsequent interview sessions.

For the third and fourth stages of data collection, semi-structured interview techniques were used for students and teachers. It was believed that the data collected by this method would enable the students to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner and allow the researchers to explore the underlying patterns of thinking that go beyond the surface level answers on questionnaires.

The interviews were conducted with the students and teachers during the regular school time. The interview questions for students and teachers are as follows:

2.3.1 Students

1). How important is it for you to study English?

2). Has your motivation to learn English changed over the years, if so why?

3). What can the school do to enhance your motivation?

4). How can teachers help increase your motivation?

5). What other things would help increase your motivation?

2.3.2 Teachers

1). Do you think there is a change in students' motivation as they grow older, if so why do you think this is?

2). What do you think the school can do to enhance student motivation?

3). What can teachers do to help increase student motivation?

*2.4 Data analysis*

The data obtained from the Student's Motivation Questionnaire was computer coded and processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 9.2. The negatively worded statements were recoded before calculating the composite scale scores. The 'Teacher's Evaluation of Student's Motivation Questionnaire' and the Achievement scores were also analysed using the SPSS.

The analytical procedure consisted of four phases. Firstly, in order to check if the scales in our 'Student's Motivation Questionnaire' were reliable, the researcher computed for each scale the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient. Items which reduced the internal consistency of a scale were omitted from the scales before further analytical procedures were carried out. As can be seen in Table 3 most figures meet acceptable levels of reliability.

Secondly, a correlational analysis using Pearson Product-Moment Correlations was conducted to identify the interrelationship between the motivational variables and to examine the relationship between those factors and effort, motivated behaviour and achievement scores. Thirdly, a One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the mean scores of the motivational variables, effort and motivated behaviour across the various age groups. Fourthly, Post-hoc tests were conducted to find out which groups were significantly different to each other.

The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The data were content analysed in two groups, Grade 8 and Grades 9 and 10 in order to look for patterns and relationships within the text and compare responses between the different age groups. Notes were taken of student's answers and were listed in specific descriptive phrases that could be presented and read in a clear and comprehensible fashion. At the end of the analysis there was one complete table illustrating the responses to the questions. As with the students' interviews the tape-recorded interviews of the teachers were analysed in a similar fashion to that of the students.

**3. Results & discussion**

*3.1 Questionnaire*

3.1.1 Reliability of the student's motivation questionnaire

By grouping items that measured the same target area it was possible to obtain multi-item scales and compute total scale scores for them. Based on theoretical considerations and a series of reliability analyses, seventeen such scales were produced from the 101 items contained in the student's questionnaire and the three items from the teacher's questionnaire – the scales are described in Table 3. The internal consistency reliability of each of these subscales was measured by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. These coefficients ranged from .57 to .88 with a mean coefficient of .72. Generally the more items a category contains, the higher the reliability estimate. Therefore, given the relative shortness of the scales, most of these estimates are acceptably high.

*3.2 Correlational analyses*

3.2.1 The whole sample

Following the reliability analysis, a correlation analysis was conducted to identify the interrelationship of the motivational variables and to examine the relationship of those factors with effort, motivated behaviour and achievement scores. The motivated behaviour scores were obtained from the 'Teacher's Evaluation of Student's Motivation Questionnaire'. The achievement scores were based on the first term examination marks of the school year.

The correlations for the whole sample (*n*=144) can be found in Table 4. As can be seen many coefficients are significant - there are a total of twenty three in all. Most significant correlations emerged with 'Effort'. This was to be expected because effort in this study was operationalised as 'intended effort' and was measured with the same item format and item type as the motivational variables. It is quite remarkable that as many as eight motivational variables correlated significantly with the 'Examination results'. This shows that motivation did play an important role in the students' learning outcomes. Although most of the motivational variables have a significant positive correlation with the criterion measure 'Effort', it is only 'Attitudes towards the English lessons' that has shown a highly significant positive relationship (i.e. significant at the p < .01 level) with all the three criterion measures: 'Effort', 'Motivated behaviour' and 'Examination results'. This confirms the situation-specific emphasis of motivational studies. Further confirmation of this trend was obtained by the fact that no other variables have a correlation of over 0.5, and only three other scales, 'Satisfaction', 'Expectations of English' and 'Attitudes towards the textbook' have a correlation over 0.4 with the learning context, which is made up of components related to the lessons and textbook, together with satisfaction and expectations are major determinants of effort to do well in English classes. The impact of the learning context is also reflected by the correlation between 'Attitudes towards studying English' and 'Effort'.

Thus, the above findings emphasise the importance of the learning situation level of student motivation, particularly the course-specific motivational components comprising the syllabus, materials, teaching method and tasks as outlined in Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation. The results therefore give empirical support to Dörnyei's hypothetical construct. Further evidence to support this important finding can be found in eight studies conducted in different parts of the world. (Chambers, 1998, 1999; Clément et al 1994; Donitsa-Schmidt et al 2004; Inbar et al 1999, 2001; Mihaljević, 1996; Nikolov, 1999, Ozek & Williams 1999). These scholars have been cited in the introduction. In addition to this, Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model also includes attitudes towards the learning situation, which is related to evaluation of the teacher and course and is regarded as one of the main components of the integrative motive. This implies that the teacher and L2 course are directly linked to the L2 group, whereas in this study, the presence of significant correlations between integrative orientation and attitudes towards the lessons with effort lacks sufficient evidence to support a direct relationship to the L2 community. Rather integrative motivation and attitudes towards the English lessons are regarded as two separate constituents of L2 motivation.

Besides the teachers, parents are also influential figures in helping their children acquire an L2, as indicated by the significant positive correlation between 'External influences of parents' and 'Effort'. This is in agreement with a study carried out by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Conrod (2001), where results indicated a particularly salient parental influence.

3.2.2 Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10 combined

The results of the correlational analysis for Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10 are shown in Table 5. By splitting the sample into two sub-groups there are fewer significant correlations which are partly due to the reduced sample sizes. However, as can be seen in the table, another reason for the less clear cut picture is the difference between the two age groups.

Motivation does not seem to play a very salient role in junior high school in determining outcomes whereas it does in senior high school, and the changes are the combined function of two reasons: 1) As we will see later, motivation has been found to decrease significantly in the higher years. This means that in junior high school there is an overall level of motivation with far less variance than in senior high school, which depresses correlation coefficients in general. 2) A

second, more speculative, explanation is that as students mature their motivational perspectives become clearer: those who feel motivated and responded accordingly in the questionnaire really mean it, whereas in others demotivation has also been established by that stage.

### 3.3 One-way analysis of variance

#### 3.3.1 The whole sample

The results of the correlation analyses indicate that there are differences between the motivational dispositions of various subgroups in the whole sample. This warranted performing a one-way between group analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean scores of the motivational variables and criterion measures (effort and motivated behaviour) across these sub-groups.

The scores across each of the five class groups are shown in Table 6. The ANOVA results reveal highly significant differences with regard to a number of key motivational variables. Following the analysis, a post-hoc comparison was performed to see which groups differed significantly from one another (See Table 7). Looking at the results (Table 7), a very consistent pattern emerges as the variables that show age difference are always characterised by a decline with age particularly amongst the older learners (Grades 9 and 10). This powerful and consistent trend, which has parallels in the literature (See the introduction of this paper), is one of the most important findings of this study, and it will be further examined in the following analyses. Also, the follow-up interviews will look into the broader issue of motivational change.

#### 3.3.2 Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10 combined

The combination of Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10 was believed to be of particular importance in this analysis as it reflects the junior and senior high school division. In addition, it enabled the researcher to compare these results with that of other empirical studies which found that motivation towards learning a foreign language declines with age.

The results of this analysis reveal significant findings for Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10 (See Table 8). The consistent pattern that has been found shows that the lower grades (7 & 8) have received significantly higher mean scores for seven of the motivational variables and the criterion measure effort. These findings unambiguously confirm what has already been shown earlier that motivation decreases with age. Interestingly, these findings mirror those of Williams et al (2002) recent study and that of Chambers (1999). These authors found a decrease in motivation to learn French and German between Grades 7 and 9. In addition, Palicz (1994) also found that certain aspects of L2 motivation and the related activities of the learner seem to change in the course of time. Although some of the drops are greater than others - and particularly the 'Attitudes towards the coursebook' worsened - the negative shift appears to be a consistent characteristic of the sample. In order to shed more light on the reasons behind this powerful declining tendency, a round of qualitative interviews for students and teachers was conducted, the results of which will be reported below.

### 3.4 Interviews

#### 3.4.1 How important is it for you to study English?

From the analysis of the interviews, it is evident that all learners regard English as being an important language for them to study. This is particularly clear in their unanimous responses to Question 1. A typical learner response was as follows:

"Very important because English is a language which is used in most countries and like for my studies and reading, watching television."

#### 3.4.2 Changes in motivation

As was mentioned earlier, the main objective of the semi-structured interviews was to try to obtain a more in depth explanation as to why the motivation of the older learners' in particular towards learning a second/foreign language decreases with age as they enter the senior high school.

The results of the interviews appear to be in accordance with those of the quantitative comparisons based on the questionnaire data as all the interviewed students mentioned that they were motivated to some degree to learn English in the lower grades (Grades 6, 7, & 8). The emerging patterns for Question 2 of the semi-structured interview indicate that the majority of learners' motivation decreased in the higher grades (Grades 9 and 10). One high school teacher highlights this by saying:

"It's getting worse by the year. The loss of motivation is increasing."

This finding casts more light on the temporal dimension of motivation and is in accordance with the findings of the post-hoc comparisons which revealed that age difference was always characterised by a decline with age, particularly amongst the older learners.

Students attributed their decrease in motivation mostly to the teachers and aspects related to the lessons. The teachers' findings are in accordance with the students as they also mentioned factors related to the teachers, such as, making

classes interesting and explaining lessons clearly. This finding emphasises the importance of external factors related to the teacher and course-specific motivational components outlined in Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation.

3.4.3 The school's motivational influence

Since students' motivation can be strongly affected by external and uncontrollable factors such as the school and the teachers' influence, Questions 3 and 4 attempted to elicit what students think the school and teachers can do to enhance their motivation. The results for the former question reveal that the majority of Grade 9 and 10 learners mentioned that the school should employ native-speaking and good teachers.

3.4.4 The teacher's motivational influence

To shed more light on the teacher's motivational influence, the responses to Question 4 showed that the majority of the older learners (Grades 9 and 10) mentioned that teachers should possess certain qualities amongst them are: (a) to make the lessons fun/interesting and also the teacher should be more interesting, too; (b) to explain well/more; (c) to be friendly/nice/kind and (d) to encourage students to study. The teacher's behaviour and lack of consideration towards the needs of the students can result in their low levels of motivation. This student says:

"I think that my motivation is very low when I ask a question that I don't know and the teacher just totally just looks at me as if I'm stupid or something for not knowing this thing, but the teacher is there to teach you and you're trying to learn and they're trying to bring you down, so I feel very low about myself when like they just bring you down like that."

This is how one student referred to the teacher's method of teaching:

"When teachers aren't in the mood for explaining which is a lot of the time they just pass through everything because they have to and that just makes us feel like it's boring."

This student expresses the importance for teachers to vary the lessons.

"Grammar is useful, but people need a change."

Interestingly, the teachers' findings also concur with the results of the learners as students claim that their motivation can be enhanced by teacher-related factors such as encouraging students to study. One teacher explains how this can be done:

"I think it will need to be a sort of collective effort on the part of the teachers, sort of encouraged by the administration, but excellence and good work could be rewarded openly, so there could be a school policy for rewarding good work."

In accordance with these findings, Cheng & Dörnyei's (2007) study on Taiwanese teachers also found that teachers placed a high value on promoting student effort.

The results of this question confirmed the earlier findings that motivational change is to a large extent caused by the students' perception of the teacher. In agreement with these findings Chamber's (1999) study also found that of all the factors which may contribute to students' positive or negative evaluation of L2 learning, the teacher comes out on top for all cohorts surveyed.

3.4.5 Other influential factors

Question 5 sought to find out other factors that would help increase student motivation. The results for this question demonstrate that friends' positive comments can motivate them whereas negative comments can have a devastating affect on motivation. The majority of older learners stated that their friends' negative attitudes and comments about the teacher, lessons and school do strongly influence them. This student explains how his friend's negative comments affect his motivation:

"Sometimes my friends when they say it's so boring and I have to like support them because I am bored, too. Sometimes when I'm not bored they say they're bored, I have to say I'm bored, too because I'll be an outcast from them, say they'll start making jokes out of me and stuff like that, so I have to agree with them all. It certainly decreases my motivation a lot. Always like everyday they say it once so I have to say it once and I start believing it's boring, start believing those words."

**4. Conclusion**

The current study was aimed at finding out the extent in which various factors affect students' motivation and achievement in foreign language learning particularly as they enter the senior high school and whether motivation decreases with age. The results of the quantitative data and qualitative interviews give further support to the findings of empirical research conducted in different parts of the world which found that motivation does decline with age. It was hypothesised at the outset that factors related to the learning context would have the greatest effect on the students' language learning due to the students' lack of exposure to native-speaking people. The findings confirm this hyposthesis as there are a number of different factors that can have a motivational influence on students' during the course of their

studies. In the eyes of the learners, the teacher is seen to be the key figure in determining the attitude to the language and in shaping motivation. Therefore, the teacher has the complex task of generating initial student motivation and helping students maintain it. The teacher's support, enthusiasm, positive approach in providing a learning experience which is interesting is an important motivational component. The above findings provide further evidence of the importance of the Learning Situation Level including Teacher-Specific and Course-Specific Components outlined in Dörnyei's (1994) framework of L2 motivation.

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Table 1. Grades, gender and language proficiency level of students included in the present study

| Grade | Total | Gender | | Proficiency level[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Female | Male | |
| 6 | 28 | 17 (60.7%) | 11 (39.3%) | 72% |
| 7 | 32 | 15 (46.9%) | 17 (53.1%) | 65% |
| 8 | 26 | 13 (50%) | 13 (50%) | 63% |
| 9 | 34 | 10 (29.4%) | 24 (70.6%) | 61% |
| 10 | 24 | 8 (33.3%) | 16 (66.7%) | 56% |
| Total | 144 | 63 (43.8%) | 81 (56.2%) | 63.4% |

[a]Mean examination results

Table 2. The main variables in the questionnaire and the number of items for each

| Variables | Number of items |
|---|---|
| Orientations to Learning English | 14 |
| Attitudes Towards Studying English | 8 |
| Frequency of Contact with Native- Speaking People | 3 |
| Frequency of Contact with Target Language | 7 |
| Quality of Contact with Native-Speaking People | 3 |
| Quality of Contact with Target Language | 7 |
| Attitudes Towards L2 Community | 4 |
| Parental Encouragement | 4 |
| Parents Expectations | 4 |
| Friends Influences | 4 |
| Anxiety in Class | 5 |
| English Use Anxiety | 3 |
| Expectations | 6 |
| Effort | 7 |
| Self-Evaluation of English | 6 |
| Desired English Proficiency | 6 |
| Satisfaction | 2 |
| Attitude Toward the English Lessons | 4 |
| Attitude Toward the English Textbook | 4 |

Table 3. Number of items, reliability coefficients and sample items for all scales

| Motivational Scales | # Items | English | Sample Item |
|---|---|---|---|
| Instrumental Orientation | 9 | .81 | Studying English is necessary for my future educational plans. |
| Integrative Orientation | 9 | .81 | Studying English will allow me to get to know people from different parts of the world. |
| Attitudes Towards Studying | 7 | .75 | I really enjoy studying English. |
| Frequency of Direct Contact | 3 | .75 | How often do you converse with students at school whose first language is English? |
| Frequency of Indirect Contact | 7 | .73 | How often do you watch TV in English? |
| Quality of Contact with language | 7 | .62 | How much do you enjoy watching TV in English? |
| Quality of Direct Contact | 3 | .73 | How much do you enjoy conversing with people in general whose first language is English? |
| Parental Influences | 8 | .75 | My parents think English is important to learn. |
| Anxiety | 6 | .74 | I feel embarrassed when I speak in front of the class. |
| Expectations | 4 | .57 | I expect to be able to speak fluently and at ease with someone in English. |
| Effort | 6 | .64 | Do you complete your assignments in English? |
| Self-Evaluation | 6 | .88 | I read English. |
| Desired Proficiency | 6 | .80 | I would like to be able to read in English. |
| Satisfaction | 2 | .61 | Are you satisfied with your class work in English? |
| Attitudes Lessons | 4 | .63 | enjoyable - not enjoyable |
| Attitudes Textbook | 4 | .76 | interesting - not interesting |
| Motivated Behaviour | 3 | .66 | motivated - not motivated |
| Total: mean coefficients | | .72 | |

Table 4. Pearson product-moment correlations between measures of motivational variables, effort, motivated behaviour and examinations results for the whole sample (Grades 6-10)

| Variables | Effort | Motivated behaviour | Exam results |
|---|---|---|---|
| Instrumental Orientation of English | .20* | -.05 | .02 |
| Integrative Orientation of English | .37** | .03 | .10 |
| Attitudes Towards Studying English | .33** | .14 | .16 |
| Frequency of Direct Contact with English | .13 | -.02 | .05 |
| Frequency of Indirect Contact with English | .30** | .18* | .20* |
| Quality of Contact with English | .30** | .09 | .17* |
| Quality of Contact with Native-People | .34** | .12 | .18* |
| External Influences of Parents | .34** | -.08 | -.04 |
| Anxiety of English | -.04 | -.21* | -.26** |
| Expectations of English | .47** | .11 | .06 |
| Self-Evaluation of English | .37** | .10 | .25** |
| Desired English Proficiency | .24** | .14 | .27** |
| Satisfaction with English | .49** | .14 | .28** |
| Attitudes Towards English Lessons | .55** | .24** | .32** |
| Attitudes Towards English Textbook | .43** | .03 | .22* |
| **Multiple correlation** | .73** | .42* | .47** |

*$P < 0.05$      **$P < 0.01$      *** $p < .001$

Table 5. Pearson product-moment correlations between measures of motivational variables, effort, motivated behaviour and examinations results for Grades 7, 8 and 9, 10

| Motivational variables | Grades 7 & 8 | | | Grades 9 & 10 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Effort | Motivated behaviour | Exam results | Effort | Motivated behaviour | Exam results |
| Instrumental Orientation of English | .31* | -.10 | .02 | .27* | -.13 | -.06 |
| Integrative Orientation of English | .33 | -.03 | .05 | .42** | .04 | -.01 |
| Attitudes Towards Studying English | .52** | .24 | .15 | .24 | .11 | .16 |
| Frequency of Direct Contact with English | .03 | -.03 | -.03 | .13 | .05 | .13 |
| Frequency of Indirect Contact with English | .31 | .16 | .13 | .29* | .23 | .21 |
| Quality of Contact with English | .25 | -.11 | .00 | .38** | .34** | .39** |
| Quality of Contact with Native-People | .17 | .01 | .16 | .41** | .22 | .23 |
| External Influences of Parents | .16 | -.01 | -.13 | .30* | -.13 | -.12 |
| Anxiety of English | -.02 | -.18 | -.13 | -.08 | -.23 | -.47** |
| Expectations of English | .42** | -.07 | -.01 | .55** | .31* | .10 |
| Self-Evaluation of English | .15 | -.08 | .03 | .38** | .24 | .39** |
| Desired English Proficiency | .38** | -.11 | .24 | .03 | .24 | .29* |
| Satisfaction with English | .28* | -.10 | .07 | .51* | .39** | .31* |
| Attitudes Towards English Lessons | .36** | .16 | .26 | .61** | .38** | .31* |
| Attitudes Towards English Textbook | 34* | .03 | .24 | .42** | .15 | .11 |
| **Multiple correlation** | .72* | .62 | .51 | .80*** | .66* | .62 |

*$P < 0.05$      **$P < 0.01$      ***$P < 0.001$

Table 6. The results of the one-way analysis of variance of the motivational variables and the criterion measures (effort and motivated behaviour) among Grades 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10

| | Grade | M | SD | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effort | 6 | 4.56 | 0.44 | 2.31 | 0.06 |
| | 7 | 4.53 | 0.37 | | |
| | 8 | 4.48 | 0.46 | | |
| | 9 | 4.31 | 0.70 | | |
| | 10 | 4.20 | 0.59 | | |
| Motivated Behaviour | 6 | 5.29 | 0.98 | 1.48 | 0.21 |
| | 7 | 4.59 | 1.65 | | |
| | 8 | 5.36 | 1.48 | | |
| | 9 | 5.24 | 1.43 | | |
| | 10 | 5.06 | 1.31 | | |
| Instrumental Orientation | 6 | 4.40 | 0.88 | 2.30 | 0.06 |
| | 7 | 4.75 | 0.26 | | |
| | 8 | 4.54 | 0.36 | | |
| | 9 | 4.57 | 0.35 | | |
| | 10 | 4.43 | 0.41 | | |
| Integrative Orientation | 6 | 4.38 | 0.76 | 4.40 | .002** |
| | 7 | 4.56 | 0.39 | | |
| | 8 | 4.40 | 0.43 | | |
| | 9 | 4.10 | 0.57 | | |
| | 10 | 4.04 | 0.63 | | |
| Attitudes Towards Studying English | 6 | 4.33 | 0.67 | 3.76 | .006 |
| | 7 | 4.63 | 0.42 | | |
| | 8 | 4.54 | 0.39 | | |
| | 9 | 4.32 | 0.63 | | |
| | 10 | 4.11 | 0.54 | | |
| Frequency of Direct Contact with English | 6 | 4.04 | 1.13 | 0.87 | 0.48 |
| | 7 | 3.77 | 1.01 | | |
| | 8 | 3.96 | 0.66 | | |
| | 9 | 3.90 | 0.87 | | |
| | 10 | 3.61 | 0.81 | | |
| Frequency of Indirect Contact with English | 6 | 4.42 | 0.64 | 1.42 | 0.23 |
| | 7 | 4.21 | 0.62 | | |
| | 8 | 4.23 | 0.69 | | |
| | 9 | 4.05 | 0.76 | | |
| | 10 | 4.11 | 0.49 | | |
| Quality of Contact with English | 6 | 4.46 | 0.49 | 0.70 | 0.60 |
| | 7 | 4.59 | 0.55 | | |
| | 8 | 4.40 | 0.55 | | |
| | 9 | 4.41 | 0.52 | | |
| | 10 | 4.41 | 0.47 | | |
| Quality of Contact with Native-People of English | 6 | 4.40 | 0.77 | 0.19 | 0.94 |
| | 7 | 4.41 | 0.87 | | |
| | 8 | 4.30 | 0.60 | | |
| | 9 | 4.33 | 0.62 | | |
| | 10 | 4.28 | 0.65 | | |
| External Influences of Parents | 6 | 4.40 | 0.70 | 4.29 | .003** |
| | 7 | 4.54 | 0.61 | | |
| | 8 | 4.54 | 0.53 | | |
| | 9 | 4.16 | 0.58 | | |
| | 10 | 4.02 | 0.49 | | |
| Anxiety of English | 6 | 2.02 | 0.90 | 0.83 | 0.51 |
| | 7 | 2.04 | 0.78 | | |
| | 8 | 2.17 | 0.59 | | |
| | 9 | 2.02 | 0.89 | | |
| | 10 | 1.76 | 0.93 | | |
| Expectations of English | 6 | 4.57 | 0.73 | 0.48 | 0.75 |
| | 7 | 4.48 | 0.62 | | |
| | 8 | 4.53 | 0.51 | | |
| | 9 | 4.53 | 0.51 | | |
| | 10 | 4.35 | 0.69 | | |
| Self-Evaluation of English | 6 | 4.58 | 0.45 | 1.71 | 0.15 |
| | 7 | 4.47 | 0.38 | | |
| | 8 | 4.37 | 0.52 | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 9 | 4.24 | 0.77 | | |
| | 10 | 4.35 | 0.47 | | |
| Desired English Proficiency | 6 | 4.88 | 0.42 | 1.0 | 0.43 |
| | 7 | 4.90 | 0.17 | | |
| | 8 | 4.76 | 0.33 | | |
| | 9 | 4.75 | 0.56 | | |
| | 10 | 4.75 | 0.42 | | |
| Satisfaction with English | 6 | 4.77 | 0.35 | 8.70 | .000** |
| | 7 | 4.42 | 0.71 | | |
| | 8 | 4.13 | 0.71 | | |
| | 9 | 3.81 | 1.04 | | |
| | 10 | 3.83 | 0.64 | | |
| Attitudes Towards English Lessons | 6 | 6.74 | 0.45 | 4.73 | .001** |
| | 7 | 6.81 | 0.28 | | |
| | 8 | 6.52 | 0.78 | | |
| | 9 | 6.43 | 0.64 | | |
| | 10 | 6.21 | 0.70 | | |
| Attitudes Towards English Textbook | 6 | 6.37 | 0.98 | 7.82 | .000** |
| | 7 | 6.47 | 0.81 | | |
| | 8 | 6.18 | 1.21 | | |
| | 9 | 5.57 | 1.09 | | |
| | 10 | 5.16 | 1.19 | | |

**p < 0.01

Table 7. Post-hoc comparison of the motivational variables and criterion measures among Grades 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 that showed a significance between-group difference in the ANOVA

| | Integrative orientation | Attitudes towards studying | Influence of parents | Satisfaction with English | Attitudes towards lessons | Attitudes towards textbook | Exam results |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grade 6** | 4.38 | 4.33 | 4.40 | 4.77 | 6.74 | 6.37 | 72.25 |
| **Grade 7** | 4.56 | 4.63 | 4.54 | 4.42 | 6.81 | 6.47 | 65.25 |
| **Grade 8** | 4.40 | 4.54 | 4.54 | 4.13 | 6.52 | 6.18 | 62.68 |
| **Grade 9** | 4.10 | 4.32 | 4.16 | 3.81 | 6.43 | 5.57 | 60.59 |
| **Grade 10** | 4.04 | 4.11 | 4.02 | 3.83 | 6.21 | 5.16 | 56.42 |
| | | | | | | | |
| ***F*** | 4.40 | 3.76 | 4.29 | 8.70 | 4.73 | 7.82 | 3.86 |
| ***P*** | .002 | .006 | .003 | .000 | .001 | .000 | .005 |
| **Post-hoc comparison** | 7, 8, 6 | 7, 8, 6, 9 | 7, 8, 6, 9 | 6, 7 | 7, 6, 8, 9 | 7, 6, 8 | 6, 7, 8 |
| **LSD[a]** | 8, 6, 9, 10 | 6, 9, 10 | 9, 10 | 7, 8 8,10,9 | 8, 9, 10 | 9, 10 | 7, 8, 9, 10 |

[a]Least significant difference. Numbers refer to students grades; numbers in the same line indicate non-significant mean differences

Table 8. The results of the one-way analysis of variance between the motivational variables and criterion measures (effort and motivated behaviour) among Grades 7 & 8 and 9 & 10

| | Grade | M | SD | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effort | 7 + 8 | 4.51 | 0.41 | 5.77 | 0.02* |
| | 9 + 10 | 4.26 | 0.65 | | |
| Motivated Behaviour | 7 + 8 | 4.93 | 1.61 | 0.65 | 0.42 |
| | 9 +10 | 5.16 | 1.37 | | |
| Instrumental Orientation | 7 + 8 | 4.66 | 0.32 | 5.00 | 0.03* |
| | 9 +10 | 4.51 | 0.38 | | |
| Integrative Orientation | 7 + 8 | 4.49 | 0.41 | 19.47 | .000** |
| | 9 +10 | 4.07 | 0.59 | | |
| Attitudes Towards Studying English | 7 + 8 | 4.59 | 0.41 | 13.85 | .000** |
| | 9 +10 | 4.23 | 0.60 | | |
| Frequency of Direct Contact with English | 7 + 8 | 3.86 | 0.87 | 0.22 | 0.64 |
| | 9 +10 | 3.78 | 0.85 | | |
| Frequency of Indirect Contact with English | 7 + 8 | 4.22 | 0.65 | 1.44 | 0.23 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.07 | 0.66 | | |
| Quality of Contact with English | 7 + 8 | 4.50 | 0.55 | 0.92 | 0.34 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.41 | 0.50 | | |
| Quality of Contact with Native-People of English | 7 + 8 | 4.36 | 0.75 | 0.13 | 0.72 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.31 | 0.63 | | |
| External Influences of Parents | 7 + 8 | 4.54 | 0.57 | 17.90 | .000** |
| | 9 +10 | 4.10 | 0.54 | | |
| Anxiety of English | 7 + 8 | 2.10 | 0.70 | 1.54 | 0.22 |
| | 9 +10 | 1.91 | 0.91 | | |
| Expectations of English | 7 + 8 | 4.50 | 0.57 | 0.16 | 0.69 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.46 | 0.59 | | |
| Self-Evaluation of English | 7 + 8 | 4.43 | 0.45 | 1.88 | 0.17 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.28 | 0.66 | | |
| Desired English Proficiency | 7 + 8 | 4.83 | 0.26 | 1.36 | 0.25 |
| | 9 +10 | 4.75 | 0.50 | | |
| Satisfaction with English | 7 + 8 | 4.29 | 0.72 | 9.99 | .002** |
| | 9 +10 | 3.81 | 0.89 | | |
| Attitudes Towards English Lessons | 7 + 8 | 6.68 | 0.58 | 8.65 | .004** |
| | 9 +10 | 6.34 | 0.67 | | |
| Attitudes Towards English Textbook | 7 + 8 | 6.34 | 1.01 | 22.18 | .000** |
| | 9 +10 | 5.40 | 1.14 | | |

*$p < 0.05$    **$p < 0.01$

# The Application of Context Theory in English Teaching of Reading

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**Abstract**

Context theory is a very important theory in English teaching, especially the teaching of reading. This paper first analyzes the theory of context, including the features of context and some principles in context theory. Then the paper discusses the application of context theory in English teaching of reading, including some problems met in reading comprehension test and some teaching methods related to context theory.

**Keywords:** Context, Co-text, Local interpretation, Analogy, Prediction

## 1. Introduction

In the production of text, the producer will put the text in the restriction of certain society, language and matter world. The society, language and matter world that interact with the text are called context. According to Malinowski, context is classified into three types: context of utterance, context of situation, and context of culture. These elements are quite important in analysis of the text. For example, in order to understand a piece of text, it is necessary to know whom the speaker and hearer are, and the time and place of the production of the text. In this paper I shall discuss the theory of context and its application in English teaching of reading.

## 2. Features of Context

J. R. Firth, regarded by many as the founder of modern British linguistics, proposed an approach to the principled description of social contexts which bears a close resemblance to more recent descriptions which we shall examine:

"My view was, and still is, that 'context of situation' is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events… A context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:

A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.

(i) The verbal action of the participants.

(ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.

B. The relevant objects.

C. The effect of speech act."

An approach similarly emphasizing the importance of an ethnographic view of communicative events within communities has been developed by Hymes in a series of articles. Hymes views the role of context as limiting the range of possible interpretations on the one hand and as supporting the intended interpretation on the other hand.

Hymes sets about specifying the features of context which may be relevant to the identification of a type of speech event in a way reminiscent of Firth's. Like Firth, he seizes first on the "persons" participating in the speech event. Generalizing over speech events, he abstracts the roles "addressor" and "addressee". The addressor is the speaker or writer who produces the utterance. The addressee is the hearer or reader who is the recipient of the utterance. Knowledge of the addressor in a given communicative event makes it possible for the analyst to imagine what that particular person is likely to say. Knowledge of his addressee constrains the analyst's expectations even further. Thus, if you know the speaker is the prime minister or the departmental secretary or your family doctor or your mother, or if you know that the speaker is speaking to a colleague or his bank manager or a small child, you will have different

expectations of the sort of language which will be produced, both with respect to form and to content. If you know, further, what is being talked about, Hymes' category of "topic", your expectations will be further constrained. If then you have information about the "setting", both in terms of where the event is situated, and in terms of the physical relations of the persons with respect to posture and gesture and facial expression, your expectations will be still further limited.

The remaining features of context which Hymes discusses include large-scale features like channel (how is contact between the participants in the event being maintained——by speech, writing, signing, smoke signals), lode (what language, or dialect, or style of language is being used), message form (what form is intended——chat, debate, sermon, fairy-tale, sonnet, love-letter, etc.) and event (the nature of the communicative event within which a genre may be embedded). Later Hymes adds other features, for example key (which involves evaluation), and purpose (what the participants intended should come about as a result of the communicative event).

## 3. Co-text

So far we have mainly discussed the physical context in which single utterances are embedded and we have paid rather little attention to the previous text co-ordinate. Lewis (1972) introduced the co-ordinate to take account of sentences that include specific reference to what has been mentioned before as in phrases like the aforementioned. However, it is the case that any sentence other than the first in a fragment of text will have the whole of its interpretation forcibly constrained by the preceding text, not just those phrases which obviously and specifically refer to the preceding text, like the aforementioned. The words that occur in text are constrained by what we call their co-text. The interpretation of utterances within a text is also constrained by co-text. Co-text refers to the relations between different parts of the text. Now consider the following text:

(1a)A man and a woman are sitting in the living room. The woman is sitting reading quite happily. The man is bored and goes to the window. He looks out of the window and gets himself ready and goes out.

The reader must interpret "the woman is sitting reading quite happily" as the "woman" already mentioned, hence must construct an interpretation which has her "sitting reading quite happily in the living room". Similarly the "window" which the man approaches must be interpreted as "the window of the living room". The speaker continues with a change of location and we have to assume that what follows is within the newly introduced location:

(1b) He goes to a club. He has a drink and talks to the barman. Then he starts dancing with a beautiful girl and has a good time.

We interpret everything that happens here as happening to the man we met in the living room who is now at "a club". So he "has a drink, talks to the barman, starts dancing and has a good time" all at the "club". The speaker announces another change of location:

(1c) Then he goes home and calls her. His wife overhears him.

Again we assume that we are still talking about the same man. He has returned "home" where the "living room" we first meet is located. Now the analyst may be doubtful on how to interpret the sentence "and calls her", for the man might reasonably go into the house and call (shout for) his wife. However, this interpretation is ruled out by the following co-text "and his wife overhears him". So we are obliged to interpret "calls" as meaning "phones" and "her" as "the beautiful girl with whom he danced".

For the moment the main point we are concerned to make is to stress the power of co-text in constraining interpretation. Even in the absence of information about place and time of original utterance, even in the absence of information about the speaker/writer and his intended recipient, it is often possible to reconstruct at least some part of the physical context and to arrive at some interpretation of the text. In general, the more co-text there is, the more secure the interpretation is. Text creates its own context. As Izard (1975) remarks: "Communications do not merely depend on the context for their interpretation, they change that context."

## 4. The Principle of "Local Interpretation"

When people read and understand a text, they will use some principles to make sure that they will understand the text reasonably. One principle is called the principle of local interpretation. This principle instructs the hearer not to construct a context any larger than he needs to arrive at an interpretation. Now let us see how we understand Sack's (1972) much-quoted sequence with this principle:

(2) The baby cried.

The mommy packed it up.

It is possible to imagine that the first of these sentences describes one event and the second describes another quite unrelated event. However, the principle of local interpretation will guide us to construct a limited context in which "the mommy" is the mentioned baby's mother and the expression "it" is used to refer to the previously mentioned baby.

Moreover the sequence of events will be understood as happening adjacently in time and situated adjacently in place. It does not even occur to the reader that the baby might have cried one year in China and be picked up by its mother a year later in America. It would be possible to establish a setting in which such a sequence of events would be plausible, but, if no such setting is established, the reader will assume a local interpretation in respect of time, place and participants.

It must be obvious that "local interpretation" may only be vaguely conceptualized. It seems unlikely that in interpreting (2) the reader postulates any exact physical distance between the mother and the baby at the point before the mother picks the child up, or that he bothers to wonder whether the mother picks the child up after it has finished crying or whether the child was still crying when the mother picked it up. Similarly it seems unlikely that the reader will bother to construct a three-dimensional, photographic representation of "the baby" who cries in the first sentence and who is picked up in the second sentence. "Local interpretation" probably relates to another strategy which instructs the hearer or reader to do as little processing as possible, only to construct a representation which is sufficiently specific to permit an interpretation which is adequate for what the hearer judges the purpose of the utterance to be.

Everything that I have said so far in this section leans heavily on the hearer's or reader's ability to utilize his knowledge of the world and his past experience of similar events in interpreting the language which he encounters. It is the experience of similar events that enables him to judge what the purpose of an utterance might be. It is his knowledge of the world that constrains his local interpretation.

## 5. The Principle of "Analogy"

Another principle which people use in reading and understanding a text is the principle of analogy. This principle will provide a reasonably secure framework for interpretation for the hearers and for the analyst most of the time. Most of the time, things will indeed conform to our expectations. However, conventions can be flouted and expectations upset, either deliberately for a stylistic effect, or by accident or oversight. When the speaker or writer is deliberately flouting a convention or upsetting an expectation for a stylistic effect, he can only bring off that effect because the convention or expectation exists.

The principle of analogy is one of the fundamental heuristics which hearers and analysts adopt in determining interpretations in context. They assume that everything will remain as it was before unless they are given specific notice that some aspect has changed.

## 6. The Application of Cultural Context

The usage of language depends on context. Any text is the product of certain context. Reading is the process of understanding text. If the reader cannot understand the context with which the writer produces the text correctly, he cannot understand the text according to the writer's intention. Situation, common knowledge and the subjective factors of the participants are essential conditions of understanding text. Steffensen (1986) asked Indian students who speak English and American students to read a text which reflects Indian culture. After reading he asked the students to recall the plot. He found that in the understanding of the third "they" in the text, the Indian students whose linguistic competences were relatively weak could make correct judgments, while the American students whose linguistic competences were strong could not:

(3) Prema's parents were not sure how they felt about that, but they allowed him to see her anyway. In this day and age they were lucky.

According to traditional Indian custom, the fiancé cannot see the fiancée before wedding ceremony. If the fiancé wants to see the fiancée before wedding ceremony, he must get the permission of the fiancée's parents. With the development of society, young people seldom obey this custom. When Prema's fiancé requested to see her before wedding ceremony, Prema's parents knew that their future son-in-law behaved himself, obeyed the tradition and respected them. They felt lucky to have such a son-in-law. American students did not know this kind of culture. They believed that the fiancé and fiancée were unfortunate because they could not see each other until wedding ceremony. Now they were allowed to see each other. They were very lucky. So the American students believed that "they" referred to Prema and her fiancé. This example shows us the role of cultural context or common knowledge in reading.

## 7. Problems Met in Reading Comprehension Test

Reading comprehension test can check the students' ability and effect of understanding the language. In such kind of test the students should know the context that the writer constructs and they should construct a context that helps them understand the text. This will greatly affect the students' accuracy and speed in the test. Many students only notice the surface meaning of words and sentences. They do not enter the context positively and do not stimulate the common knowledge with the writer. When these students meet several unknown words, they will feel quite helpless. Now let us look at the following reading comprehension test questions and analyze how to get correct answers to these questions.

(4)A team of researchers has found that immunizing patients with bee venom instead of with the bees' crushed bodies can better prevent serious and sometimes fatal sting reactions in the more than one million Americans who are

hypersensitive to bee stings. The crushed-body treatment has been standard for fifty years, but a report released recently said that it was ineffective. The serum made from the crushed bodies of bees produced more adverse reactions than the injections of the venom did.

The research compared results of the crushed-body treatment with results of immunotherapy that used insects' venom and also with results of a placebo. After six to ten weeks of immunization, allergic reactions to stings occurred in seven of twelve patients treated with the placebo, seven of twelve treated with crushed-body extract, and one of eighteen treated with the venom.

Question 1: What is the main topic of the passage?

A. A new treatment for people allergic to bee stings.

B. A more effective method of preventing bee stings.

C. The use of placebo in treating hypersensitive patients.

D. Bee venom causing fatal reactions in hypersensitive patients.

Question 2: The most successful treatment described in the passage was a serum prepared from_____.

A. the blood of patients who had been stung

B. poison extracted from bees

C. crushed bodies of bees

D. a placebo and a crushed-body extract

Question 3: In order to be successful, the treatment referred to in the passage must be administered _____.

A. by a series of injections given before the patient is exposed

B. by injections immediately after the patient has been stung

C. orally for six to ten weeks before the patient is stung

D. orally immediately after the patient is stung

There are some rarely used words, e.g. venom, serum, immunotherapy, adverse reaction, placebo, allergic reaction, etc. in the text. If the teacher pays little attention to the role of context in everyday teaching, the students will be puzzled by the unknown words and spend a lot of time guessing the meaning of these words. Thus the speed of comprehension is affected and the students cannot get the answers to the questions in the limited time. On the contrary, if the students get training of this aspect in their study, comprehension will not be affected by the unknown words.

## 8. The Method of Prediction in Reading Comprehension Test

In 1985 Halliday and Hasan pointed out that a learner of English language should learn to make correct prediction. "Prediction" here means putting forward such question as "What will appear in the following part?" and answering the question. According to the theory of "register", field of discourse is used to predict experiential meaning, tenor of discourse is used to predict interpersonal meaning, and mode of discourse is used to predict textual meaning. Although there are some unknown words, we can make the following location after reading the first sentence of example (4):

Field of discourse: Discussing the prevention of sting reactions

Tenor of discourse: Doctor or scientist communicates with the reader

Mode of discourse: Expository written report

By this location, we can make global prediction to the text. In this text the doctor or scientist reports in written form the prevention of sting reactions to us. The unknown words must be medical terminologies. Then we make local prediction:

Researchers found that (a) immunizing patients with venom can prevent serious and sometime fatal sting reactions better than (b) immunizing with bees' crushed bodies.

According to experience, we predict that the following part will make comment on (a) and (b):

(b) has been standard for fifty years, but a report released recently said that it was ineffective.

Experience shows that the following part will discuss why the effect is not good:

(b) produced more adverse reactions than (a).

We predict that the writer will make comparison of experiments:

In the report, the result of (b) is compared with the result of (a) and (c) placebo.

In the comparison there must be data of experiment:

After six to ten weeks of immunization, allergic reactions to stings occurred in seven of twelve patients treated with the placebo, seven of twelve treated with crushed-body extract, and one of eighteen treated with the venom.

Now the readers can understand the main idea of the text. They can make the decision that the correct answer to Question 1 is "A".

According to the world knowledge of ordinary readers, vaccines can be injected to prevent some diseases. This text talks about the prevention of sting reactions, so the two things for injection must be something similar to vaccines. With the linguistic context located in the question, we will know the meaning of "venom" and "serum". In answering Question 2, according to the understanding of the text's main idea, it is easy to judge that "B' (poison extracted from bees) is the correct answer. In answering Question 3, experience shows that vaccines should be injected before people become ill, so "A" and "C" may be chosen. There is specific time in "C" (six to ten weeks before…). This is not mentioned in the text. According to our world knowledge, the injected people may not predict the time when they will be stung by the bees. So "A" is the correct answer. Of course, this process of understand is very short in real reading. The purpose of showing it here is to explain the importance of reorganizing the context constructed by the writer in reading comprehension.

## 9. Methods in English Teaching of Reading Related to Context

In English teaching of reading, because of the differences of culture, linguistic competence and common knowledge between writers and students, it is very important to train the students' ability of reaction and reconstruction of context. Teachers may use the following methods in English teaching of reading:

(A) Choose suitable teaching materials and strengthen the students' consciousness of context. The specific method is to ask students to read a text in normal speed. After reading the teacher should make the students judge the field of discourse, tenor of discourse, mode of discourse and the main situations set up in the text. After some time the students' consciousness of context will be raised.

(B) Train the students' ability of reconstructing the context set up by the writer and the reactive ability of stimulating the common knowledge quickly. The concrete way is to ask the student to read a text in normal speed. Then the teacher immediately asks some questions connected with these abilities. It does not matter if the students give wrong answers. What they are required is to react quickly.

(C) Train the students' ability of predicting the following text quickly. The students are required to predict what will happen in the text when they begin to read the text. To make correct prediction, the students should construct the contextual factors concerned first. So training the ability of prediction should begin after the training of method (A) and (B).

(D) Enlarge the students' world knowledge. Students of English major should be encouraged to read books in other fields. Thus their common knowledge will be enlarged.

(E) The situations set up by the writer in the previous part of the text also belong to common knowledge. In reading teachers should train the students' ability of recalling the situations in the previous part of the text.

(F) Courses on the culture of English-speaking countries should be offered to reduce the cultural differences between writers and students.

(G) In setting up questions of multiple choices in reading comprehension, teachers should pay attention to the questions concerning the students' reactive ability of context.

Besides the training of contextual knowledge, vocabulary and basic linguistic knowledge are also important in understanding a text. In setting up questions of reading comprehension test, teachers should be guided by certain theories. If the questions are concerned with contextual ability, teachers should pay attention to the students' linguistic level. Teachers should also notice that the questions should be helpful to test whether the students really understand the text. For instance, if the teacher set up questions like "How many people were treated with the venom?" in Example (4), these questions will be helpless for the teacher to grasp the students' degree of comprehension because the students can get answers to these questions without reading the whole text. Question 2 of Example (4) is more helpful in testing the students' degree of understanding the whole text and their reading ability.

## 10. Conclusion

Context theory is a branch of the theory of text linguistics. The theory of context can be applied in English teaching, especially the teaching of reading. In English teaching of reading, if the teacher consciously uses context theory to guide teaching, the students will overcome the difficulties in reading comprehension more easily and they will read faster and make fewer mistakes. This paper provides some methods in the teaching of reading based on context theory. I hope teachers and students will benefit from it.

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# Cultural Differences on Chinese and English Idioms of Diet

# and the Translation

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**Abstract**

Idioms is a special culture which is shaped in the daily lives of the local people, particularly the idioms of diet has a close relation with various elements, such as the eating custom , history, fairy tales, geographic situations. Also, different ways of translation on different diet idioms in English and Chinese will be analyzed in this article. As a result, it will be very important to know the great culture contents in the idioms of diet in order to do a better job in the research of cross-culture communication and the translation.

**Keywords:** Idioms, Cross-culture communication, Translation, English, Chinese

## 1. Introduction

Idioms are shaped in a community after a long period's living of the local people, and it is the reflection and expression of the culture of a certain race, because of this, the differences on geography, history, custom and living habits will be reflected in the word-using in idioms especially in the idioms of diet. Using idioms when speaking is a usual way for the local people to express their ideas clearly and lively to others from another nation, so in the course of cross-culture communication, it is an important thing to use them correctly in order to make us better understood by the people with different cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, only the people who are very good at speaking that kind of language can use adequately and to the point use idiomatic expressions in their speech, and the reason is that most of the time, people know little about the history and the culture behind these idioms. Some scholars point out that idioms are often colloquial metaphors---terms which require users to have some foundational knowledge, information, or experience, to use only within a culture where parties must have common reference. As the development of new technology and the shape of the global country, the need of strengthening conversation between different nations becomes more and more urgent. But the research in such a field is still limited and only during recent twenty years more scholars began to pay attentions to the field of folk-custom and contact this with the cross-culture communications research, but recent researches always combine all idioms together without any logical and systematic convey and classification. The following contents will start from the diet idioms in both Chinese and English, and set up a basis in order to introduce more idioms to the people with different cultural backgrounds, this part includes large numbers of idioms which contain words that are used to describe food and the reasons which lead to the differences of word-using in the two languages, besides this, many examples are used to prove these opinions.

## 2. The Difference of Word-Using in Diet Idioms Related With People's Eating Habits in English and Chinese

In most languages, idioms are created by the laboring people and the local people during their daily life, so naturally, the words that describe the necessities people use or the food they eat are used frequently in idioms. Because of the special living conditions and the geographical situations, the western people like eating the food that can provide them enough energy, calories and high nutritious. Meat is the favorite food of the English people, they prefer beef, mutton, chicken, and game meat, but eat less pork than Chinese people, for Islamism is one of their major religion, and people from such a group refuse to eat pork. They are used to preparing fruits in every meal, and they also like drinking wines such as beer, grape wine and liquor. Toasted bread is made as their main course, and if there are pudding, soup, ham and fresh vegetables, that would be a wonderful dinner. Except various wines, the western people also like drinking milk and tea. They even make such a kind of habit as a part of their life. They like to drink the black tea from China but the way of drinking is different from the Chinese people. Fixed time is one of their characters in every afternoon; English people will choose a suitable place and enjoy the beautiful afternoon with some friends under the warm sunshine with a cup of mixed milk-tea. All of these eating habits have a close relation with the particular geographical conditions. The Great Britain is an island country with large area of oceans around, and the warm temperature and marine climate make this place good for the growth of the grass, and for the development of stockbreeding. Because of the long coastline of England, their lives can not be kept without the Marine Fisheries. The fast pace of the modern life makes the fast food popular in American's life. Hamburgers and hotdogs can be found in every restaurant and snack

stall with steaks, fried chicken, seafood and salad. After every meal, dessert will be prepared, and this part always contains: apple-pie, cheese cake, chocolate, ice-cream, sundae and so on.

In china, rice and wheat are considered the materials for the main course. Their interests are on the taste of food, so the kinds of dished and cooking techniques are various, such as pan-frying, stir-frying, quick-frying, deep-frying, stewing, and smoking. These differences reflect on the use of words in idioms. These words not only can be used to describe food but also own the characteristic of a certain nation. That is to say, these words not only own their conceptual meaning, but also have abundant figurative meaning and reflected meaning.

*2.1. The Favorite Food of the Western People and the Related Idioms*

2.1.1. Idioms Which Contains "Bread"

Like rice in the life of the Chinese, bread also plays a very important way in the western people's daily life; so there are large numbers of idioms that contains the word "bread", such as:

A. Bread and Butter

The meaning of this idiom is the way of somebody to earn his living, and the second meaning is "common things". For example: It is a bread and butter diamond.  It means a common diamond. Although there are differences between the two meanings, they are still very similar. But it is not always used that way; a bread-and-butter letter is no longer a common letter but a kind of letter to show the thanks of the guests to the host's warm reception.

B. Earn One's Bread

This idiom has the same meaning as "earn one's living", for example: He now earns his bread by doing odd jobs.

C. Hope is poor man's bread.

The initial meaning of this sentence is that if a poor man wants to survive he should not give up his hope toward life.

2.1.2. Idioms Which Contains "Butter"

Butter is also a necessary part in the meal of the western people. Except the examples listed above, there are other expressions, like:

A. Butter Up

This idiom means to praise or flatter somebody excessively to try to change someone's mind by doing things for him or her and being really nice so he or she will do what they want. This saying comes from the simple act of buttering a piece of plain bread which is like making it look and taste better, this is the same as flattering a person, for example: He began to butter up the boss in hope of being given a better job. But "to butter up somebody" means to entrap or ensnare someone. The two meaning of the idiom is contrary to each other.

2.1.3. Idioms Which Contains "Potato"

The custom of eating potato in America has been kept for a long time and that can be dated to the foundation of the country. Although it is said that potato is originally planted in Holland, it has already become a part of English. In the colonial period, the culture of potato has also been passed to America. As a result, the Americans also express their interests on potatoes in idioms:

A. "A hot potato" refers to a trouble or a difficult problem which can not be solved easily. The meaning can be easily understood from the image described in the idiom.

B. "A big potato" is used to describe an important person.

C. "A couch potato" is used to describe a kind of person who lives a life with minimum effort or an inactive TV addict. Television was invented in the 1940s; this idiom dates from the 1970's, and has a close relation with the television. Some people say that because the Americans like keeping themselves in the sofa and eating potato chips when they were watching TV.

2.1.4. Idioms Which Contain "Cheese"

"He is a big cheese in the company" means he takes an important part in the company.

"My brother and I are as different as chalk and cheese" means my brother and I are completely different from each other, because cheese and chalk are apparently two different kinds of things.

2.1.5. Idioms Which Contain "Egg"

The daily life of housewives is trivial and ordinary, but the idioms they created are not less good than those by their husbands, as they have convenient access to the colorful grassroots of life and they have rich experience of household life.

A." Over-Egg the Pudding"

It is to spoil something by trying too hard to improve it. To add too many eggs to a pudding, or even to add more to the instant cake makes it unnecessary, is to go too far, to be excessive, hence the current meaning of "to exaggerate", for example:

As a director, I think he has a tendency to over-egg the pudding with a few too many gorgeous shots of the countryside.

B .An Egg-Head

This idiom comes from the ancient Greece story and it refers to the intellectual people, for in English, "egg" is usually used to express the positive meaning.

Except above, people use "Good Egg" to describe a good person and "golden eggs" means great benefits.

2.1.6. Idioms Which Contain "Cake"

Western people like cooking and baking different deserts, which not only reflect their eating habits but also their high quality lives.

A. A Piece of Cake

It means it is easy to solve the problem.

B. "Take the Cake" means to be the best or to be the first. For example:

I have heard of a lot of crazy stories, but this one takes the cake.

C. To have one's cake and eat it.

This idiom means "to have the advantages of two things which contradict each other". This saying first turned out in the proverbs collected by John Heywood. The cake will disappear after one eats it, and it is impossible to keep it and eat it at the same time. This saying can be seen in many languages like in French, people will use "you can not have the cloth and keep the money" to replace that, for the modern and fashionable cloth is the unique character of France, and in Italy, they will ask: "Do you want to eat your cake and still have it in your pocket?". These expressions can also reflect that: behind every idiom, there are different histories and cultures of different nations.

2.1.7. Idioms Which Contain "Cream" and "Cheese"

The developing and advancement of animal husbandry in English-speaking countries make milk products popular in these countries, and this is also reflected in idioms.

A. Cream of the Crop

It means the outstanding people or the best of everything. Cream rises to the top, and the top is associated with the best. And cream is considered the best part of un-homogenized milk. For example:

We are looking to hire only the cream of the crop.

B. A Big Cheese

It means an important person but it is usually said sarcastically. Some cheese has a very noticeable smell. A big cheese will be noticeable. The sarcasm comes from the fact that the smell is sometimes unpleasant. For example:

If you want a raise in pay, you have to be nice to the big cheese.

2.1.8. Peanuts

In the United States, you can buy lots of peanuts for a dollar, so each peanut is worth very little. That is why this idiom means be a very small amount of money.

For example:

I am glad that you worked hard all summer selling lemonade and saved five hundred dollars, but to be honest, that is peanuts when it comes to paying for your college education.

2.1.9. Idioms Which Contain "Salt"

Salt was an expensive necessity in the past time, and it is also an indispensable sauce in the meal. In the middle ages, in the upstream society, if the host invited guests to have dinner at home, they would put the salt pot in the right middle of the table, and ask the honored guest to sit in front of the salt pot in order to show his or her respect. Others would sit on the sides of the long table.

2.1.10. Idioms Which Contain "Milk"

A. "Cry over spilled milk" means to be regretful to the fault that you made but you can not change the result. For example:

I really feel regretful about it now, but there is no use crying over spilled milk.

B. "Milk and Water" means boring things and persons. It has the same meaning as "the Plain Water" in the Chinese saying. The difference between the two languages is decided by the different living style of the two races.

2.1.11. Idioms Which Contain "Fish"

From the ancient time till now, people who live in the countries on the sea depend on the fishing industry, most of their living resources are fish. So idioms containing fish are many:

A. Every little fish would become a whale.

This sentence is used to encourage people to become a successful man.

B. Cut no fish till you get them.

C. Never offer to teach fish to swim. This idiom has the same meaning as the Chinese idiom "ban men nong fu".

D. Who would catch fish must not mind getting wet.

E. A Big Fish in A Small Pond.

This saying also has the similar meaning in Chinese and the difference is that they compare people with different animals, for example: the English sentence, "She was the kind that would rather be a big fish in a small pond" can be translated to "Ta shi na zhong ning wei ji tou bu zuo feng wei de ren".

2.1.12. Idiom Which Contain "Wine"

Western people can not have a dinner without wine, whisky, grape wine, and various beers. These are all their favorite beverages, which can be reflected in idioms.

A. "There are less to every wine". This sentence means nobody is perfect in the world.

B. Wine and wenches empty men's purses.

C. Wine is a turncoat, first a friend, then an enemy.

D. Wine is old men's milk.

E. Wine makes all kinds of creatures at table.

F. Wine and judgment mature with age.

G. Bacchus hath drowned more men than Neptune.

In this sentence, Bacchus is the Roman name for Dionysus, god of wine, son of Zeus and Semele, a daughter of Cadmus. Neptune is the name of the god of sea in the Roma mythology, so this sentence can be translated directly as "wine drowned more men than the ocean".

h. In wine there is truth.

### 2.2. The Words of Diet Used in Chinese Idioms

Compared with the warm temperate maritime climate of the Great Britain, the continental climate of China makes it an agricultural country. Because of the particular national conditions, the large numbers of people and the shortage of average natural resources make the need for food more urgent. Grains are planted in abundance in all directions of the whole country, among them, corns, wheat, rice are the most popular ones. Although meat, especially pork is Chinese people's favorite food, the expensive price can not be accepted by most of the people in the past. As a result, the kinds of dishes are abundant, and the shortage of food makes the Chinese people explore their intelligence and invented many cooking methods to cook food, which make Chinese dishes famous both at home and abroad.

2.2.1. Rice

The importance of rice in China can be compared to bread in English. It is the main course in almost every meal of all the families especially in the southern part of China. There are a lot of idioms which contain the symbol of "rice", that is "mi"in Chinese, such as:

A. Qiao fu nan wei wu mi zhi chui

It means no matter how clever a housewife is, she can not cook without materials.

B. Bu wei wu dou mi zhe yao

It is used to describe a person who never gives up his principles to be a better man when he is faced with benefits.

C. Bai yang mi yang bai yang ren

It means everyone is different in their minds, appearances and the way they treated others.

2.2.2. Other vegetables

Except rice, Chinese people also like eating vegetables, bean curd, lotus root, and sauce, so the idioms of diet are:

A. Dao zi zui, dou fu xin

It means although the person likes scolding others, actually he is a kind man. For example: Although his mouth is sharp as the knife, his heart is soft like the bean curd.

B.Huang hua cai dou liang le

It means everything is late, "huang hua cai " is a kind of vegetable which is common in Chinese dishes, but here it is a metaphor, and it is compared to somebody or something which is late to do something or which is delayed and can not be solved any more.

C .Luo bo bai cai, ge you suo ai

In this sentence there are two common vegetables, and it is traditionally used to talk about people who have different opinions and could not agree with the others. But it is usually translated as "every man has his hobbyhorse", which can not be directly translated to "everyone loves his cabbage and radish".

D. Ou duan si lian

In Chinese literature works, authors choose this idiom to describe a special relationship between two people, especially a man and a woman who still keeps contact with each other after they break up. "ou"is a kind of vegetable planted in the south of china, the character of it is when it is cut apart, there are still fiber connect each part of it. In translation, it can not be translated directly into "lotus root" because it is not familiar to the western people.

## 3. Different Ways of Translation on Different Diet Idioms in English and Chinese

*3.1 Finding the Same Structure in English and Chinese Idioms*

3.1.1. Completely Similar Structures

A. Idioms Which Have the Same Structure but Can Not Be Translated Directly

a. "Kill the Goose" that Lays the Golden Eggs

At the first sight of this idiom, if you are familiar with Chinese idioms, it is easy to find the sentence that has the same structure in Chinese that is "sha ji qu luan", except this, by considering the habit of word-using of the western people, it can be easier for you to understand the meaning of the phrase or sentence, because the word "goose" in English always has the same meaning as "chicken" in Chinese.

b. "A Piece of Cake" can be easily translated into "xiao cai yi die" if you know

this Chinese idiom and the Chinese culture on dishes and diet.

c. "As a man sows, so shall he reap"

This idiom can be translated into "zhong gua de gua, zhong dou de dou". In both of English and Chinese there are similar expressions, so it is easy to translate this kind of idioms.

d. In the idiom "to have one's cake and eat it" can be translated into "yu yu xiong zhang liang zhe jian de" for in Chinese idiom here is a saying: "yu yu xiong zhang bu ke jian de".The meaning is when you are in such a condition, you must choose one and give up the other one .They both have the same meaning. But in most of the time, because of the great differences in English and Chinese culture we can not always find the idioms which have both similar structures and similar meanings, For example: From the structure of the idiom "one cannot make a silk pure out of a sow's ear" people will at once find an idiom which has the same structure in Chinese, that is "qiao fu nan wei wu mi zhi chui ", but in the following sentence, you will find problems:

What is the use of a scholarship to that boy? He will never be a gentleman; you might as well try to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

In this sentence, the meaning of this idiom is "you cannot make something good of what is by nature bad or inferior in quality". Apparently, "sow's ear" refers to "bad material", and silk purse refers to good things, so the Oxford Dictionary translate this idiom into "huai cai liao zao bu chu hao dong xi" which means one can not make productions with good quality from bad materials. On this point it has the similar meaning with the Chinese saying, "xiu mu bu ke diao".

B. Idioms Which Has the Same Structure And The Same Figurative Meaning

This kind of idiom takes a little part in languages. They have the same structures and the same figurative meaning, so translating them directly not only can make the readers understand but also does well for keeping the original style of the material. For example, "tang yi pao dan" can be translated directly into "sugar-coated bullets" and "sour grapes" can be translated directly into "suan pu tao", and the peculiar reason is that because of the communication between the

western and eastern, some new words are introduced from one country to another and become one part of the local people as time passes by.

*3.2. Idioms Which Have Not Similar Structures*

Except above idioms, there are also idioms in English which have not the corresponding sayings in Chinese idioms, so we should translate them indirectly by using other words we usually use to express such ideas, for example, "Above the salt". From the literal meaning no one knows the figurative meaning of it, and we must know the idiom comes from an ancient story related to the eating custom of the middle age English people, and the habit of putting salt in front of honored people, so the meaning is being in a position of honor, when we translate the idiom we can say "bei zun wei shang bin".

Another example is "spill the beans" which means to reveal or make known a secret or a piece of information, only translating the literal meaning will make people confused and cause troubles, so we can refer to the source of the idiom and found it come from an ancient Greek story about their selection system, as a result, it can be translated into "to make known a secret".

*3.3 Translation Methods from Chinese to English*

3.2.1. Find the same structure in English, and change the improper word to the one they used to use, for example:

"ning wei ji tou, wu wei niu hou"is one of the popular Chinese idioms, but in English, "chicken" is always used to describe a coward man, in Chinese, "ji tou" has the positive meaning, and in English "dog" has a positive meaning, so this idiom should be translated as "better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion".

The same case also happens in the idiom, "gua yang tou mai gou rou", it used to be translated as "cry up wine and sell vinegar" or "offer chaff for grain".

3.2.2. When the literal meaning is not used as frequent as its figurative meaning.

Idioms should be added the figurative meaning after the literal meaning when translation.

For example, "jiang hai shi lao de la" can be translated as "The old ginger is spicy". And then add "older people have more experienced" after that.

**4. Conclusion**

As an important part in languages, idioms take the heavy responsibility of spreading culture and put forward the civilization of a nation or a community. Each idiom contains a small part of the customs of the local people. This article sets a sight from the angle---the idiom which contains words of diet as an introduction of large numbers of idioms in both English and Chinese, to show the different cultures behind them and the different values reflected by these idioms.

These differences are decided by the history background, different living habits and customs, even the geography environment, and their particular climates and reflected in every aspect in their lives. Language absolutely is not an exception. Idioms are largely shaped by the laboring people when they are working, in order to understand them, we should have enough knowledge about their daily life, their history and their customs. Another source is the influences from other country which contains the introduction of costume, festival, food, word, language and so on. The influence also comes from different religions, as Christ is the major religion in England and many other idioms came from the bible. Except above, idioms are also influenced by some mythologies in the ancient time, like the Greek mythology and Aesop's Fables. Chinese idioms are the same. Some words come from their daily life and some of them from the fairy tales and the long history. As the need of communication become more and more urgent between countries in the world, the exchange of culture and knowledge is also an important mission.

Translation is a proper way of spreading culture to other countries, and the translation on idioms is no doubt a good action to put this idea into practice, for translation, enough knowledge of the history, geography, custom is necessary, what is more important is the skills of translation, we not only should express the ideas exactly to the both sides, but should master methods on translation, making translation a kind of art , except carrying forward the fine traditions of the former translators in this field, like keeping the principles on translation : keeping the style of the original material, expressing the original idea of the author of the original text, and keeping to the fact, later translators should make more efforts to summarize their own translation skills from their practices and experiences. Only by sticking to the translation principles and deep study and research on the culture can make idiom a more effective medium in the course of cross-culture communication.

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# On the Benefits of Careful Within-Task Planning and Task Repetition

# in EFL Classrooms

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**Abstract**

This paper is aimed at reviewing the theoretical and practical issues regarding careful within-task planning and task repetition in EFL classrooms. In particular, the paper focuses on the combined effects for these two implementation variables on the enhancement of accuracy, complexity, and fluency in EFL learners' oral production. Research shows that careful within-task planning has positive impacts on accuracy and complexity of learner language. Nonetheless, it is sometimes avoided because of its detrimental effects on fluency. Also, the practice of task repetition might be sometimes frowned upon given its superficial resemblance to what was prevalent in the Behaviorist era. However, both theory and teachers' experience in the EFL context confirm that repeating tasks, with certain time-intervals in between, assists complexity and fluency. Careful within-task planning and task repetition, combined, have the potential to help learners attending to both form and meaning and thus enhancing accuracy, complexity, and fluency simultaneously.

**Keywords:** Careful within-task planning, EFL classrooms, Task repetition

## 1. Introduction

During the last decade task-based language teaching and learning (TBLT/L) has turned out to be the buzzword in the EFL context. Despite this surge of interest in the academia, language teachers and practitioners have voiced concern at the utility of TBLT to facilitate the process of language production and acquisition in the EFL context (Sheen, 1994; Swan, 2005). The sources of such concerns are diverse. In this paper, however, we touch upon some of them under three main headings; this will serve as a prelude to our further discussions regarding careful within-task planning and task repetition.

### 1.1 Learners' expectations

In the first place, in the EFL context, and in particular in the Iranian context, language learners expect language teaching practice to enjoy some degree of face validity. In fact, Iranian EFL learners have proved somewhat resistant to innovation and, therefore, they do not approve such radical departures from the traditional language teaching methodologies which are still prevalent in many Iranian language canters. For instance, performing a game-like jigsaw

task, they may think, does not help them learning language. They expect to witness more explicit and interventionist methodologies.

*1.2 Teacher-student relationships*

In the Iranian context (and of course some other EFL contexts), English language classes have long been teacher-fronted ones with teachers playing active roles and serving as one of the major sources of input to language learners. TBLT, however, empowers language learners by letting them to have a voice in the classroom. This might, in turn, lead to a kind of gradual transference of power from teachers to language learners, which is not desirable to teachers and to the education system.

*1.3 Focus on grammar*

In the Iranian EFL context, explicit teaching of grammar is of prime importance to language learners. Many language learners conceive of learning a language as mastering grammatical rules and gaining a vast repertoire of vocabulary. However, task-based methodology, by its very nature, puts premium on meaning. In fact, as Skehan and Foster (2001, p. 184) argue, unless task-based methodology is approached appropriately, it can "over-emphasise the importance of just 'getting the job done' at the expense of the central purpose of pedagogy: improving target language ability." Therefore, such an approach may induce learners to fall back on their strategic competence for task completion.

Additionally, most studies conducted in the area of TBLT have been done in tightly controlled settings, which leave us with some questions as to whether or not TBLT works for teachers in the actual classrooms (Van den Branden, 2006). During the last decade, researchers have proposed different implementation variables to make up for the shortcomings of TBLT and to make this approach more useful for second language development. This paper focuses on two of these methodological options and their interaction: careful within-task planning and task repetition.

## 2. Careful within-task planning; theory and practice

In the field of second language acquisition, the notion of planning has been widely used in different models of speech production (Ellis, 1994). The most frequently used and cited theoretical framework in second language speech production research is Levelt's (1989) model. The mechanisms which underlie speech production as conceptualized by Levelt could be reduced to one sentence: "People produce speech first by *conceptualizing* the message, then by *formulating* its language representation (i.e., encoding it), and finally by *articulating* it [italics added]" (Kormos, 2006, p. 7). Speech production system is also equipped with a 'self-monitoring mechanism' (Scovel, 1998). Given the existence of such mechanism, it is safe to posit that in the course of speech production the speaker may detect erroneous or inappropriate structures in the output, and by halting the speech flow finally makes the appropriate correction (Kormos, 2006). In many cases, however, the speaker notices the erroneous forms and brings about corrections prior to articulation and thus engages in what Kormos (2006, p.123) refers to as "covert repair" and carefully plans her speech 'online'.

Different types of planning are distinguished in terms of when the planning occurs (Ellis, 2005). *Careful within-task planning*, on which this paper focuses, takes place online, during task performance and at the formulation phase of the Levelt's three-staged model. It is distinguished from *pressured within-task planning* in that in the former language learners have ample time to plan their speech and make use of the allotted time to carefully attend to their performance, whereas in the latter language learners are required to produce language under time pressure (Ellis &Yuan, 2005). Careful within-task planning is conceptually characterized as "… the process by which speakers attend carefully to the formulation stage during speech planning and engage in pre-production and post-production monitoring of their speech acts" (Yuan & Ellis, 2003, p. 6).

Researchers investigating into the effects of planning on learners' L2 production and acquisition have also distinguished between *on-line* and *off-line (strategic)* planning (Wendel, 1997). The former concerns the kind of planning that takes place during performance, and the latter concerns planning prior to the performance. Planning has been the focus of a series of studies (see Ellis and Yuan, 2004, 2005; Foster, 1998; Ortega, 1999; Robinson, 1995; Skehan & Foster 1997, 2005; Yuan and Ellis, 2003); most of which, however, have investigated strategic (pre-task) planning and only a few of them have addressed careful within-task planning.

Building careful within-task planning into tasks could be operationalized and used in EFL classrooms in three different but complementary ways: (a) by providing careful online planners (COLP) with ample time for task performance to formulate and monitor their language; (b) by placing limitations on the amount of time available to pressured online planners (POLP); and (c) by requiring all participants (COLP as well as POLP) to start task performance straight away. This latter measure is usually taken so as to control for participants' engagement in pre-task planning (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Therefore, the operational definition of careful within-task planning has a lot to do with time allotment for task performance.

Research confirms that planning has important bearing on accuracy and complexity of the learner language. Increasing all dimensions of oral production in EFL learners is both desirable and difficult to achieve. The difficulty may derive

from the fact that, from the perspective of information processing theory, our attentional capacity is limited and selective (Schmidt, 2001) and thus cannot process 'schematic' and 'systemic' knowledge simultaneously (see Skehan, 1998). Bygate (2001) argues that currently one of the challenges SLA researchers face is how to integrate three dimensions of language performance as proposed and discussed by Skehan (1996), namely accuracy, fluency, and complexity. These three aspects of performance are closely linked to the concept of working memory. Working memory, in psycholinguistic parlance, refers to the *function* of the memory store whereas short term memory refers to the *nature* of this memory store (Randall, 2007). It constitutes a *buffer* for conceptualization, formulation, and articulation (see; Levelt, 1989; Kormos, 2006). In the case of speech production in task performance, working memory extracts and stores (temporarily) both linguistic and encyclopedic data from long term memory (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

As far as beginning-level and intermediate language learners are concerned, much of this process hinges on controlled rather than automatic processing which is tremendously demanding. Hence, not surprisingly, L2 learners tend to place higher priority on either linguistic knowledge (i.e. form) or encyclopedic knowledge (i.e. meaning). To show the independence of the three dimensions of performance (i.e. fluency, accuracy, and complexity) making a very brief reference to Skehan's three-way distinction is in order. Skehan (1998, cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) maintains that meaning appears to be reflected in fluency whereas form is said to be manifest either in accuracy or complexity. He, then, proposes a contrast between meaning and form and, finally, subcategorizes control (accuracy) and restructuring (complexity) under form.

According to this view, task-based methodology, which is in essence meaning-centered and outcome-oriented, may induce learners to *bypass* language form in favor of meaning (Skehan, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 2005). This may in turn lead to inaccuracy or lack of complexity in learner language. As it was mentioned previously, research indicates that careful within-task planning has a beneficial effect on the accuracy and complexity of oral production. However, it has some detrimental effects on fluency. The reason behind this increase in accuracy and/or complexity and the decrease in fluency lies in the fact that our attentional capacity is both limited and selective. Therefore, when language learners pay attention to form (which is responsible for accuracy and complexity) they are left with scant attentional capacity to devote to processing meaning (which is responsible for fluency). In EFL classrooms, too, it is observed that when learners are asked to attend to form they go through a degree of dysfluency. So, what is the solution to this problem?

From this account of meaning-form distinction it becomes evident that if we are to foster fluency of language we have to employ procedural variables such as task repetition which assist processing meaning. And to enhance accuracy or complexity we ought to use such implementation variables as careful within-task planning facilitate processing form. Therefore, in order to move toward the integration of three dimensions of language performance, and as a possible solution to the above-mentioned problem, it is recommended to use careful within-task planning in tandem with some other implementation variables such as task repetition.

### 3. Task repetition; theory and practice

Task repetition has turned out to be part of the solution to the problem mentioned earlier, namely that human beings attention is essentially limited and selective. Hence, there is not enough attentional space for processing form and meaning simultaneously. Consequently, when language learners perform a task for the first time they go through a degree of dysfluency, since they do not have enough attentional resources to conceptualize message.

Research reveals that task repetition assists fluency since "when learners know what they are going to talk or write about they have more processing space available for formulating the language needed to express their ideas with the result that the quantity of the output will be enhanced and also the fluency and complexity" (Ellis, 2003, pp. 246-7). When learners do a task for the first time, since they do not know what the task is about and what general ideas they ought to communicate their fluency decreases. However, when learners do a task for the second time, they produce language more fluently since they know what the task is about and perform the task with a preconceived notion about the content to be communicated.

By way of illustration, as it has been observed in the EFL classrooms, in a narrative task in which learners are required to tell a story from a Tom & Jerry cartoon that they are watching *for the first time*, the probable dysfluency might be attributed to the fact that learners are concerned with *conveyance of the message* (i.e. narrating the cartoon's story) and with keeping what they have just watched in their working memory. This may use up their attentional resources to a large degree. By repeating the task, however, learners' knowledge of cartoon's story frees up some attentional resources. That is, knowing the story (i.e. the meaning) may obviate the need for learners to process meaning in their subsequent performance of the same task. Now, even if learners engage in careful within-task planning, which uses some of the limited attentional capacity, language learners' fluency increases.

In spite of all this, repetition may be viewed as an obsolete practice which is reminiscent of the behaviorist orthodoxy. However, as far as methodology is concerned, the pendulum is, in a way, swinging back. But, this pendulum swing is

not a radical departure from TBLT underpinnings, in that repeating the task in this new conceptualization results from the full recognition of the complex nature of the underlying psycholinguistic processes. This view is diametrically opposed to the notion that repetition leads to memorization and in turn acquisition. Therefore, the use of task repetition and careful within-task planning are two implementation variables which together can help teachers in the EFL context to enhance all dimensions of language production in language learners.

## 4. Conclusion

Task-based methodology is based on well-structured psycholinguistic theories and there is a need for more research on the construct of 'task', however, "the challenge for a task-based pedagogy . . . is to choose, sequence and implement tasks in ways that will combine a focus on meaning with a focus on form" (Foster, 1999, 69). In this way it would also assist language learning in the EFL context. Despite the host of empirical research which has been conducted to investigate careful within-task planning and task repetition (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, forthcoming; Ellis, 1987; Bygate, 1996, 1999, 2001; Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Ellis & Yuan 2004, 2005) not much has been done to bring them down to the actual world of classroom practice, for which they are originally intended. So another fertile area of enquiry with respect to task-based approach in general and planning studies in particular would be the kind of research which provides the practitioner with some practical guidelines on how to employ planning and task repetition in the classroom.

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# Theories Analyzing Communicative Approach in China's EFL Classes

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**Abstract**

Communicative Approach is applied widely in primary and middle schools, when various modern teaching methods pour in China's EFL classes. However, the development of this effective language teaching method cannot show its advantages in China during years' practice. This paper analyzed the constraining factors, such as teaching habits, examination system, teacher's educated level and class size.

**Keywords:** Communicative Approach, EFL teaching method, Constraining factors

## 1. Introduction

With the global economic integration, learning foreign languages has been becoming a living behavior in Chinese younger generation. Therefore, more and more schools or language centers grasp this opportunity to use different EFL teaching method for developing their training market. Based on this, it impels new standard of English courses in order to pay great attention to involve the students in various class activities. The aim of the learning or teaching a language is to contribute the learners' language applied sense through encouraging them in practical activities. Nunan stated "Knowledge of grammatical structures was no guarantee of being able to use those rules for communication. Learners who are able to identify instances of rule violation, and who could even state the rule, frequently violated the rules when using language for communication." Therefore, people are focusing on Communicative Approach which almost can satisfy their expectancy.

This essay will elaborate Communicative Approach from its definition and history. Furthermore, it will evaluate this innovational approach and introduce Communicative Approach application in China in the following.

## 2. Definition

Margie S. Berns, an expert in the field of Communicative Approach teaching, writes that Language is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational, context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak)" (Berns, 1984,p.5).

During communicative activities the teacher's role will be from facilitator to monitor, usually without interruption, and then to provide feedback on the success or otherwise of the communication and, on the linguistic performance of the learners in the form of post-activity error correction. In terms of the organization of the lesson, the presentation, practice and perform model, "test, teach, test" is broken. The input of a particular structure is typically followed by controlled, less controlled and freer practice is likely to have been replaced by a more task-based approach. The learners are given a communicative task which is monitored by the teacher and then their language use while performing the task is fine-tuned by the teacher in a lesson stage which does not focus on error correction or a particular form. This is a typical model. The initial task is repeated or a similar task is performed, ideally with a greater degree of linguistic accuracy than that during the first attempt.

Compare with the traditional grammatical approach of the beginner's syllabus by presenting the special interrogative sentences introduced by "what" or "how", a more communicative with basic introductions, requests and questions enabling learners begin communicating in English from the first lesson instead. Actually, in some countries, teacher-center class is developing into students-center class. That means reducing teacher talking time to a minimum and maximizing the opportunities for communication.

## 3. History

Communicative Approach, as an innovation in English language teaching, emerged in Britain in the 1970s. Galloway (1993, p.1) mentioned that Communicative Approach's origins are many, in so far as one teaching methodology tends to influence the next. The communicative approach could be said to be the product of educators and linguists who had grown dissatisfied with the audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language instruction.

Students did not know how to communicate by using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions, when they

were taught by the traditional grammatical way. In brief, they lost the ability to communicate in the culture of the language studied. Interest in and development of communicative-style teaching mushroomed in the 1970s; authentic language use and classroom exchanges where students engaged in real communication with one another became quite popular.

In the intervening years, the communicative approach has been adapted to the primary, middle level has produced different teaching methods known under a variety of names, including notional-functional, teaching for proficiency, proficiency-based instruction, and communicative language teaching.

## 4. Judgments

### 4.1 Advantages

Communicative Approach is an innovation with many specific characteristics. It views language as a tool for communication, and interaction speaking activities in classrooms is the instances of real communication. Most of students have sufficient exposure to the target language.

Firstly, from language teaching as a kind of knowledge teaching, a very effective way to teach ESL students is through the use of the Communicative Approach, because Communicative Approach puts the real-life situations into English teaching and learning. The teacher sets up a situation, which students are likely to encounter in their real lives by using real-life situations such as going shopping, going to the bank, buying stamps at the post office, meeting and greeting people, etc. Unlike the Grammar-Translation Approach, which relies on repetitious exercise and rules and is unnecessary to create contexts presenting the language in an unnatural way, the Communicative Approach can give students a flexible situation as to the out-come of a class exercise, which will be different among their reactions and responses, because the real-life situations change from day to day and within each conversation. Students are not only exposed to new vocabulary but also to sentential and grammatical patterns. Otherwise, the natural context is developed from the students' experiences with the language. Therefore, students' learning potential would be stimulated, because their motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics. The students will have a much more varied exposure to language with communicating. They will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms.

Secondly, as language teaching is a kind of culture teaching, Communicative Approach gives students more opportunities to understand the culture of target language than other traditional approaches can. Students can easily compare the differences between their own culture and target culture when they practice the dialogue. They can feel the difference between two expressive styles through communicating. For instance, the western people prefer straightforwardness to express their thinking, but eastern characteristic is in an implicit way. Otherwise, students can learn how to use language with foreigners bravely, and then get more chance to understand the culture deeply.

### 4.2 Disadvantages

This type of approach tends to find a better way for building an environment which is close to our real life. Some learners find that this approach can involve their interesting at the beginning, but latter they get discontent on this teaching model in the class. The general reason is that, in today's society, people have more opportunities to make conversations with foreigners by target languages. The result would be more effectively than talking to the partner who is also language learners. There will, however, almost be an emphasis on more authentic contexts with example sentences being at the very least semi-authentic and potentially of communicative use rather than arbitrary examples of form with little or no communicative value. Otherwise, depending on the teaching syllabus, teachers must choose a lot of prescribed textbooks on listening and reading which use contrived texts designed to present grammatical form or vocabulary and with no attempt to communicate a meaningful message to the listener or reader. Perhaps the most maintaining of the communicative approach will be that it has allowed teachers to incorporate motivating and purposeful communicative activities and principles into their teaching while simultaneously retaining the best elements of other methods and approaches rather than rejecting them wholesale.

Moreover, most modern teachers would like to think that their classes are "communicative" in the widest meaning of the word. Piles of activities which learners communicate and tasks are completed by the usual interaction with other learners would be used in their classes. To this aim, there will probably be considerable if not extensive use of pair, group and mingling activities, with the emphasis on completing the task successfully through communication with others rather than on the accurate use of form.

## 5. Communicative Approach in China

Communicative Approach was introduced to China in the 1990s. In 1992 the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) introduced a functional syllabus, in which the communicative teaching aim was set, and the communicative functions to be taught were listed. In the same year, in cooperation with the British Longman, the SEDC published a new textbook series. The syllabus and the textbooks required teachers to teach communicatively in

classrooms. (Liao, 2000) However, at the beginning, Communicative Approach was not as popular as recent in the early 1990s. Hird (1995) pointed that the ELT in China is "not very communicative. And maybe that is just as well, because China is a vastly different English language teaching environment from the one that spawned and nurtured the communicative approach."

The first reason is that "87% of teachers in China's middle schools used the traditional method in the late 1980s" (Zuo, 1990, p.40). Teachers had focused on grammar and structure for a long time. As Johnson and Morrow (1981, p.1) stated, "New movements often begin as reactions to old ones. Their origins lie in a discontent with an existing state of affairs".

The second reason to reject reform is the inability of the teachers. Chinese teachers are not English native speakers. Most of them, especially those in rural schools, are not good at using English on listening and speaking. Their low educational level and limited understanding of linguistic knowledge may restrict the development of Communicative Approach. According to the SEDC investigation, in the 1980s, the percentage of secondary school teachers with BA degrees was only 28%, 12% of whom were Russian majors and 8% of whom were graduated with a 3-year BA program during the Cultural Revolution. Teachers with associate degrees and with secondary diplomas were 4% and 29% respectively (Zuo, 1990). So poor was their higher education that many teachers took in-service training in teacher's colleges and normal universities (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

The third reason is that the Chinese Examination System puts students and teachers into an embarrassing situation. Matriculation English Test (MET) is one National College Entrance Exams developed by the SEDC. Passing it to enter colleges and universities for further education is the most important consideration for secondary students. After 1992, listening to dialogues and answering the questions, reading comprehension and compositions are added into the examination, but speaking sills is also ignored.

The forth reason is that of the class size. A typical class was in a 'home base' classroom in China. There are approximate 50 students who sit in pairs at desks arranged in rows facing the teaching in the classroom where we learned any courses. Generally, it was difficult to organize 50 students making group work in the classroom. It would be a very noisy thing.

However, these situations are changing in some big cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou. Some schools are limiting their class size to about 20 students. Otherwise, the teacher's quality is improving. Most of them have B.A, M.A or overseas educational background.

## 6. Conclusion

Communicative Approach has witnessed almost 40 years of history. Although the approach is the closest to the natural learning, it also has some disadvantages. Especially, its advantages cannot be reflected perfectly in Chinese educational system. Many reasons, such as teaching habits, examination system, teacher's educated level and class size, are the vital issues which limit the development of Communicative Approach in China. In my opinion, there is no single teaching method which deals with everything that concerns the form, the use, and the content of the target language. Teachers need to combine the new with the old, such as the Communicative Approach with traditional teaching methods.

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# Study on the Causes and Countermeasures of the Lexical Collocation Mistakes in College English

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**Abstract**

The lexical collocation in English is an important content in the linguistics theory, and also a research topic which is more and more emphasized in English teaching practice of China. The collocation ability of English decides whether learners could masterly use real English in effective communication. In many years' English teaching practice, the author found that many college students often ignored the learning and study of the target language collocation, so they would make many collocation mistakes in English writing, dialog, and exams. The main representations and causes of these mistakes are analyzed in this article, and the main countermeasures of these mistakes would be proposed for teachers' teaching and students' learning.

**Keywords:** Lexical collocation, Language situation, Collocation mistakes, Countermeasures

## 1. Important meanings of the correct English lexical collocation

English linguist Wilkins said that "if there is no grammar, there are not many expressed things, and if there is no glossary, no things can be expressed". To learn and grasp certain quantity glossaries can learn the grammar well, or else, the grammar will be a bare outline, but glossaries are not isolated, there are different rules of composition and application situation among glossaries, which needs learners to grasp different meanings of the glossaries, the tiny difference with the thesaurus, the special language situation and relative syntactic function with other glossary combinations. It is more important to choose proper lexical collocation aiming at different language situations than the grammar structure.

In English learning, many students take the amount of English word as the main standard to measure the ability of English learning, and it seems that memorizing many words could freely use this language, but in fact, the more important is to know the relation among words, properly combine words, phrase, sentences, and lexical chunks. Some linguists said that it was more important to know the fellowship of one word.

## 2. Main types of lexical collocation and main representations of the lexical collocation mistakes

(1) The type of "verb + noun", such as "pay off one's debts", "draw a conclusion", "get into an argument", and "take a break".

(2) The type of "noun + noun", such as "newspaper kiosk", "traffic accident", and "protest rally".

(3) The type of "preposition + noun", such as "in agony", "at speed", "in writing", and "at Christmas".

(4) The type of "adjective + noun", such as "strong wind", "heavy rain", "a crushing defeat", and "a convincing win".

(5) The type of "phrasal verbs collocation", such as "rely on", "dry up", "hang on to", and "look after".

(6) The type of "verb + preposition + noun", such as "speak in English", and "go on a bus".

(7) The type of "measure word + preposition + noun", such as "a drop of water", "a piece of jewellery" and "a snatch of conversation".

According to the characteristics of lexical collocation, linguist Lewis classified the lexical collocation into the tight type, the loose type such as "carry out a study" and "hold a meeting", the central type, and the tight type with strict combination such as "rancid butter".

In about 300 non-English specialty students' English writing of Qingdao University of Science and Technology, two kinds of lexical collocation mistake occurred in most frequency, and the first one is the collocation of "verb + noun" which occupies about 50% of all lexical collocation mistakes, for example, taking "answer the telephone" as "receive the telephone" and taking "take advantage of" as "make advantage of", especially, and several verbs such as "make, do, take and have" with strong collocation capacity would be often misused with the object.

The second one is the structured mistake of "adjective + noun", which occupies about 25% of all lexical collocation mistakes. For example, the "busy traffic" or "heavy traffic" would often be translated as "crowded traffic". The mistake of "noun + noun" collocation was less, because the use of this collocation was also less.

The another cause of frequent lexical collocation mistake is the wrong instructions in some domestic teaching materials and some English teachers, because these lexical collocations are right and occur in teaching materials, but they are not accepted or used in actual life of the countries which take English as the mother language. For example, for the type of "adverb + adjective", some students would say that "She is very crazy/ very mad" when they wanted to describe someone was angry, and though the grammar was right, but people in English countries would not say that, and they would say, "She is absolutely crazy/ absolutely mad", and they would not say, "She become crazy/ became mad", but "She went crazy/ went mad". After many years' English learning, college students could express basic life topics in English, but it is very difficult to talk and write by real English, and few of them could achieve this level, and it needs a firm foundation of English language. For people in English countries, the lexical collocations could be predictable, the collocated words would automatically occur when main word appears, but for language learners, it is unpredictable.

## 3. Main causes of lexical collocation mistakes

### 3.1 Partial understanding or misunderstanding for lexical meanings

With the further study of English, the complexity and ambiguity of the glossaries will often make learners feel confused, and many collocation mistakes would occur in concrete using. For example, if students don't know the word of "flood" has the meaning of "disaster", they will often use the fault collocation such as "flood disaster". It is also wrong to use the "productivity force" to denote the meaning of "productivity".

### 3.2 Synonyms copying and thesaurus mischoosing

College students would often use the lexical collocation which only accords with the former language situation in new language situation. And they would often extend and use some lexical collocation rules without considering the exception and limitation of the special language situation, for example, they would write "do good to or do bad to" according to "do harm to", and write "gain harvest" according to the meaning of "obtain" of "gain" in "gain recognition or gain experience", but the right collocation should be "reap harvest". Though "drive a car" is right, but it is wrong to say, "Drive a bike", and the right collocation should be "Ride a bike". Students would often put off the objects of many words such as "make, do, get, have", for example, they would often write "make a gesture" as "do a gesture", and write "take a photo" as "make a photo". It was often ignored to choose different lexical collocations according to the language situation in the context, for example, students would often use the word of "hide" to denote the meaning of "conceal", such as "Several pistols were hidden in the back of the car".

The collocation rules are decided by the present language situation, not in any occasion. For example, when the word of "grasp" is to denote the meaning of "tackle or seize", it can be decorated by the adverb of "tightly", for example, "The little girl grasped her mother tightly by the wrist while crossing the street", but when it is used to denote the meaning of "understand or known", it could not be decorated by the adverb of "tightly".

Students often would not know how to properly use the word to express right meaning in formal or informal occasions, for example, "return" is more formal than "bring back or take back", and "tough" is more general and relaxed than "strict or harsh", and "superior" is more formal than "better".

### 3.3 Influences of native language

Most lexical collocation mistakes are related with the native language. Foreign language learners would intentionally or unintentionally associate or compare the foreign language with their native language, which would induce unequal associations or collocation mistakes because of the thinking mode of native language. For example, students would often replace "take medicine" by "eat medicine", and replace "read a novel" by "look a novel". "The food wasn't enough" is the expression of "Chinese English", and the right expression should be "There wasn't enough food", and "enough" should be put before the retouched noun, but when it decorates a adjective, it should be put behind the adjective, for example, "He is not old enough to drive a car".

## 4. Countermeasures of lexical collocation mistakes

First, learners should realize the importance of lexical collocation, and teachers should also put it on the important state in the teaching outline of English. In recent years, the selected teaching materials in colleges all arrange the exercises of lexical collocation, and offer some practical collocation exercises, but there is still largely improved space. For example, the glossaries involved in these exercises are less, and the exercise form is single, and theoretical explanation is shallow, which can not effectively enhance students' ability in lexical collocation. Aiming at learning on different levels, teachers could design various lexical collocation exercises. For example, to train the collocation structure of "+ noun", teachers could use the collocation of "predicate verb + noun" to train students' ability of lexical collocation.

a. We have to take part-time jobs to *clear/pay off/pay up* his debts.

b. We *did/took/went on* a trip to a nearby village by bus.

c. I put up my hand to *shade/shelter/shield* my eyes from the sun.

d. Mr. Li *came up with/presented/put forward* the suggestion that I should take a job to support my family.

e. The supervisor refused to *accept/receive/shoulder* the blame for the accident.

f. A meeting had been *arranged/scheduled/programmed* for next week

g. The scientists failed to arrive at /decide/draw any conclusions from the study.

The exercise of error correction for the lexical collocation could be designed, for example, requiring students to replace the wrong adverbs in the sentence by correct adverbs (correct answer is in the brackets).

a. He argued *hotly* about he right to ask for leave. (fiercely/heatedly)

b. He grinned *owlishly* at her. (sheepishly/wolfishly)

c. The tragic story *markedly* illustrates how vulnerable children can be. (brutally)

d. I *woefully* confessed to having forgotten the key. (ruefully)

Teachers also can require students to correct the mistakes in one article or one sentence by the dictionary. For example, "While I am away, could you please have (keep) an eye on my suitcase?"

They can design the exercise of identification. They list some nouns, and some of them could be collocated with certain verb, but some of them could not. Teachers can require students to find out the nouns which could be collocated with the verb, for example, students are required to find out the words which can be used with "make" in following words, "1. an impression, 2. noise, 3. a nap, 4. a fuss, 5. an idea, 6. a party, 7. an effort, 8. a cake, 9. a cold, 10 .a decision", where the words of "1.2.4.7.8.10" can be collocated with "make".

Teachers could select one section of the article, and empty the glossaries in lexical collocation, and require students to fill the blanks and rehearse this article, which can strengthen students' memories for the lexical collocation.

The only light in her room is coming from a p____ (1) of medical equipment, which is f____ (2) its red light as if in warning. As I stand there, the smell hits my nose, and I close my eyes as I remember the smell of decay from p____ (3) experience, in my mouth I have a s____ (4) taste coming from the p___ (5) of my stomach. I r____ (6) for the light switch, and as it silently lights the scene, I r____ (7) to the bed to observe the patient with an unemotional, medical eye.

Answers:    (1) piece (2) flashing (3) past (4) sour (5) pit (6) reach (7) return.

A good lexical collocation dictionary is necessary for learners who want to further enhance their English level. The "Oxford Collocations" published by the Oxford University Press in 2006 has about ten thousands words including nouns, verbs and adjectives, and it contains the language situation and collocations of most words for middle and high level learners, and includes 50000 example sentences which could exactly and vividly reflect the application of lexical collocation in practical life.

The "Longman Essential Activator" chiefly compiled by Rundell M could also definitely instruct the lexical collocation, and all examples in this book were selected in the linguist database of English countries, and the language was natural and real, which could help learners to grasp the correct collocation of the glossaries.

Each English learner will unconsciously establish a mental glossary or lexical collocation glossary in the learning process, for example, for the word of "familiar", you will associate it with "be familiar to or be familiar with", and once you see "dog", you will think of "bark", and when you see "cat", you will think of "meow". These accumulated mental glossaries depend on large numerous reading to fulfill and extend, and with large stocks, you can have English words at hand when you write or speak, and your English will be more accurate, abundant or real.

The establishment and continual perfection of various linguist databases will make the teaching and learning of lexical collocation more matured and standard. By the linguist databases established by the people in English countries, such as the Brown database, BNC and Lob database, learners could acquire real lexical collocation and examples. In the teaching of English and lexical collocation, the language database is the most convenient and useful assistant teaching tool for teachers.

The learning and grasping of lexical collocation are a long-term process, and foreign language learners will inevitably make mistakes in the lexical collocation, but the more important is to analyze the summarize the cause, characteristic and type of these mistakes, and find out the rule of these lexical collocation mistakes in Chinese English learners, and continually check, perfect and exercise these mistakes. Only in this way, the English learning of Chinese learners will be really enhanced.

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# Investigation of Burnout among Instructors Working at ESOGU Preparatory School

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**Abstract**

Burnout is an issue to be taken seriously in the workplaces where human interaction is salient and very important. The aim of the research is to investigate burnout among the instructors working at ESOGU preparatory school and find out what factors affect their levels of burnout. 28 instructors working in this institution participated in the study. The results of the study showed that the only significant contributor of burnout among the instructors is their perceived level of stress at the workplace. Except for that one, demographic characteristics, educational background and other work-related factors proved to have low or no significant effect on instructors' burnout levels.

**Keywords:** Burnout, Preparatory school instructors, Teacher stress

## 1. Introduction

The welfare and health of the employees in an institution are the most important elements in terms of the effectiveness of the institution. When the employees feel relaxed and happy, they work better and do their jobs in a motivated way, which is quite important for the function of the institution involved. The case is also the same for people who work for educational institutions, especially for teachers or instructors working for colleges or universities. However, the contrast, feeling unhappy and not being willing to work,   is also possible and even more common when many teachers or instructors (the term "instructor" is mainly used in this study) feel depressed in their workplaces due to some reasons, like stress,    which affect their motivation and will for work negatively.

## 2. Teacher Stress and Burnout

Stress is a biological term which refers to the consequences of the failure of a human or animal to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats to the organism, whether actual or imagined. It is the autonomic response to environmental stimulus. It includes a state of alarm and adrenaline production, short-term resistance as a coping mechanism, and exhaustion. Common stress symptoms include irritability, muscular tension, inability to concentrate and a variety of physical reactions, such as headaches and elevated heart rate (Selye, 1956).

Job stress, on the other hand, (means) refers to the job related nervousness and anxiety, which affects human's physical and/or emotional health (Netemeyer, Maxham and Pulig, 2005). It is believed that work overload and role stress are the two major stressors (Miller, Zook, and Ellis, 1989; Starnaman and Miller, 1992). While work overload refers to the heavy work-load demands, role stress means the form of role ambiguity and role conflict (Dillon and Tanner, 1995; Miller at al., 1989). It is known that teacher stress has become a growing hazard of the teaching profession (Pettegrew and Wolf, 1982). Stress among teachers is said to have been recognized as a widespread problem in different educational settings (Boyle, Borg, Falzon and Baglioni, 1995; Kyriacou, 2001; Dick and Wagner, 2001). Recent studies show that stress has become a global concern since in these studies teachers regarded teaching as quite stressful (Borg, 1990). In educational settings, the main causes of stress can be aligned as students' misbehaviors, discipline problems, students' poor motivation for school, heavy workload, time pressure, conflicting relationships among staff, administration and others (Dunham, 1992; Travers and Cooper, 1996). While some of these stressors are effective for some instructors, it is not the case for others and instructors react differently to these stress-makers (Milstein and Farkas,

1988). Researchers state that some instructors may develop varied psychological symptoms ranging from frustration, anxiety to emotional exhaustion besides psychosomatic and depressive symptoms (Dunham, 1992; Farber, 1984a,b;Kyriacou and Pratt, 1985; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978b; Schonfeld, 1992; Seidman and Zager, 1991). As it is pointed out by some researchers, teacher stress may cause a range of consequences ranging from physical, psychological, behavioral to emotional problems like fatigue, illness, absenteeism, poor job performances, alcohol and drug abuse, reduced job satisfaction, and burnout (Ray and Miller, 1991).

The term burnout is used when people are not happy about what they have been doing and when they feel depressed about their jobs and when they have the symptoms mentioned above. It is known that many have been affected by so called burnout effect which means the state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from conditions of work (Freudenberger, 1974). According to Maslach (2003), burnout is the physical, mental and emotional exhaustion resulting from chronic job attrition. In another definition by Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (1996), burnout is a syndrome of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy. In this definition, exhaustion refers to feelings of strain, particularly chronic fatigue mainly resulting from overtaxing work. Cynicism refers to an indifferent or a distant attitude towards work mainly and the people with whom one works, losing one's interest in work and feeling for work has lost its meaning. Lastly, lack of professional efficacy refers to reduced feelings of competence, successful achievement, and accomplishment both in one's job and the organization (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006).

Burnout appears in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). The first, emotional exhaustion is depicted by feelings of frustration, anger, depression and dissatisfaction. The second dimension, depersonalization means a dehumanized and impersonal view of others and treating them like ordinary things rather than people. The last dimension, reduced personal accomplishment refers to a loss of self-efficacy on the job and the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively (Maslach, 1982, 2003).

It is pointed out that burnout problem among teachers has negative consequences for both teachers and those with whom they work, including emotional, attitudinal, and physical exhaustion. Individual consequences of burnout may include physiological and psychosocial problems (Grayson and Alvarez, 2007). It is also stressed that burnout can lead to psychopathology and deterioration in social and family relations (Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz and Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005).

The risk of burnout is said to be greatly increased by teachers having perceptions of unmet or unrealistic goals and a lack of development of professional accomplishment (Evers, Tomic, and Brouwers, 2004). As teachers have these perceptions, they also start suffering from burnout in different dimensions.

In triggering burnout reactions among teachers, the role of context and school environment is stated to be effective by either facilitating or inhibiting an individual's emotional and attitudinal characteristics (Cano- Garcia, et al., 2005). The work of Bronfenbrenner (1974) who places importance on the broader social, institutional and cultural contexts of people-environment relations is one of the early researches about the topic.

There is still need for new researches to be conducted in this area to explore the concept of burnout among university instructors in Turkey. This study was carried out at the English preparatory school of Eskisehir Osmangazi University to investigate if burnout is effective among the instructors. The school has about 600 students from different faculties, most of whom are from Engineering Faculty and 28 instructors are in the department. The program started in 1996 and it has never been investigated in terms of institutional attitude and will for work since then. The aim of this study is to investigate the burnout levels of the instructors and the factors triggering burnout in EFL instructors who work in a preparatory school.

**Research Questions**

1) What is the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment of the instructors working at preparatory school of ESOGU?

2) Are there any differences among burnout levels in terms of instructors' personal factors working at preparatory school of ESOGU?

3) Are there any differences among burnout levels in terms of instructors' educational backgrounds working at preparatory school of ESOGU?

4) Are there any differences between among burnout levels in terms of work related factors for instructors working at preparatory school of ESOGU?

**3. Methodology**

*3.1. Participants*

A total of 28 EFL instructors at Eskişehir Osmangazi University participated in this study. The participants were chosen on voluntary basis.

When personal factors were analyzed, it was seen that 67.8% of the participants were female while 32.1 % of them were male participants. In terms of age, 32. 1 % of the participants were between 25 and 30; 46.4% were between 31and 35; 10.7% were between 36-40; and 10.7% were 40 and above. With regard to marital status, the participants reported that 39.2 % of them were single; 57.1 % of them were married and 3.5 % of them marked "others" option. With respect to the number of children, 60.1% of the instructors did not have any children; 25% of them had only one children; and 14.2% of them had two children.

When educational factors were considered, 71.4% of the participants had BA diplomas while 28.3% of them had MA diplomas. In terms of years of experience, 17.8%, 46.4%,   25%, and 10.7% had 2 to 4, 5 to 10, 11 to 15, and 16 to 20 years of experience, respectively. Weekly work load was 15- 18 hours for 7. 1% of the participants; 19- 22 hours for 10.7% of them; 23- 26 hours for 67.8% of them and 27 hours and above for 14.2 % of them. All the participants were instructors; however, there were those who were responsible for some certain tasks. 53.5 % of the participants were only instructors, while 3.1 % were both instructors and administrative staff; 17.9 % were both instructors and coordinators; and 25 % of them were instructors working in an office in the institution. When the instructors were asked about their stress level at that time, 14.2 % reported that they felt a little stress; 42.8 reported average stress level; 25% stated high; and 17.8 reported very high stress level.

*3.2. Instruments*

The Turkish version of Maslach Burnout Index (MBI) for educators adapted by Girgin (1995) was used in the current study. It includes 22 items which are designed to reflect three dimensions of burnout, namely Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Reduced Personal Accomplishment. The participants were required to mark these items on 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always".

*3.3. Procedure*

After getting necessary consents from administration and the participants, the questionnaire (in Appendix A) including 3 parts, comprising demographic data about the participants, basic information about their job-related tasks and Turkish version of Maslach Burnout Inventory for teachers was delivered to all the   instructors working in Foreign Languages Department at Eskişehir Osmangazi University. 28 complete questionnaires were gathered back and all were used in this study. The results gained from the inventory were scored using MBI scoring key given in Kulavuz's (2006) thesis.

Data collected from the above-mentioned instruments were analyzed using Microsoft Excel Program 2007. After scoring burnout inventory, correlations between burnout levels and personal factors, educational background and work related factors (Eker and Anbar, 2008) as well as instructors' perceived stress level were calculated to answer the research questions.

**4. Findings and discussion**

The current study was designed to investigate the burnout levels of Turkish EFL instructors working in different levels, namely elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels, at preparatory school of ESOGU. The data gained from the questionnaires was analyzed quantitatively. The burnout levels of the teachers were analyzed and the relationship between the burnout levels and personal, school related factors and the instructors' perceived stress level were examined. The results gained have been presented in the article according to the research questions investigated in the study.

**a. What is the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment of the instructors working at preparatory schools at university level?**

The results indicated that 5 out of 28 instructors suffered from burnout in all three burnout dimensions, namely Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Lack of Personal Accomplishment. 3 of the instructors were moderate while 2 of them were low in all the dimensions.

5 of the participants had high burnout level in two dimensions, Emotional Exhaustion and Lack of Personal Accomplishment. 2 of the participants had high burnout level in Emotional exhaustion and these participants had low or moderate burnout levels in other two dimensions. 2 of the participants had high burnout level in Lack of Personal Accomplishment and they had low or moderate burnout levels in other two dimensions.

In summary, in almost all levels, instructors had burnout in significant levels, which suggests that all the instructors participated in the study were affected by burnout.

Insert Table 1 Here

The personal factors investigated in this study are gender, age, marital status, and the number of children the participants had. The results of the correlation analysis indicated that there is low correlation between the burnout levels and gender and marital status. Moreover, there is no correlation found between burnout levels and age and the number of children. In brief, when the table examined, demographic features proved to be ineffective in burnout of the

instructors, which is inconsistent with the previous studies (Heus and Diekstra, 1999, Byrne, 1991; Byrne, 1999; Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984; Schwab and Iwanicki, 1982; Maslach, Schaufeli& Leiter, 2001).

Insert Table 2 Here

In terms of educational background, the results of correlation analysis showed that there is low and no correlation between Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and Lack of Personal Accomplishment, respectively.

Insert Table 3 Here

Years of experience, weekly work load, position in the workplace and the perceived stress level are considered as the work related factors. In terms of experience, the results were not significant because correlations were low for depersonalization and there is no correlation for Emotional Exhaustion and Lack of Personal Accomplishment. When weekly workload was considered, there was negative moderate correlation for EE and D dimensions, which is inconsistent with the previous studies ((Freudenberger, 1974; Dunham, 1992; Travers and Cooper, 1996) whereas there was low correlation between burnout levels and LPA. The results related to position in the workplace also revealed similar results. There was high correlation between perceived stress level and EE; however, moderate correlation between burnout levels and D and LPA.

All in all, the findings gained in the present study are not congruent with the previous studies, which indicates that the participant instructos in this study haven't been affected negatively by the    factors causing high level of burnout.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate burnout levels of the instructors and the factors of burnout affecting EFL instructors working at preparatory school of ESOGU. The results indicated that approximately 18 percent of the instructors had high burnout level and this percentage is insignificant. When the factors related to burnout were investigated, the results showed that the correlation between demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, marital status and number of children and burnout dimensions was low or nonexistent, which is inconsistent with the results of the previous studies (Byrne, 1999; Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984; Schwab and Iwanicki, 1982; Maslach, Schaufeli& Leiter, 2001). According to the results, factors related to educational background proved to have no effect on teachers' burnout levels.   The only significant result revealed that is related to work related factors is the relation between the Emotional Exhaustion level and perceived stress level, which is congruent with previous studies (Suzumura, Tachi, Takeynama, Ebara, Sakai, and Itani, 2007; Eker and Anbar, 2008).

The reason for insignificant levels of burnout among participants may be due to the relationship among the instructors, for example, collaboration among the instructors and between the instructors and the administration. Zhang and Zhu (2007) suggested in their studies that collaboration proves to have a soothing effect on the instructors and relieve teacher burnout. At the context of the present study, preparatory school, almost all the decisions are made with the participation of all instructors and administration and also it can be said that there is always a mutual understanding between the aforementioned parties. Therefore, it is possible to state that this collaboration may contribute to insignificant levels of burnout among these instructors despite being exposed to the factors mentioned as the main causes of burnout in the literature.

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**Appendix A**

**Değerli Arkadaşlar,**

Bilimsel bir çalışma için Yabancı Diller Bölümü Hazırlık sınıflarında görevli öğretim elemanlarının tükenmişlik düzeyleri hakkında bir araştırma yapılmaktadır.

Bu anket formunda istenen bilgilerin amacı kesinlikle öğretim elemanını değerlendirmek olmayıp, genel olarak tükenmişlik kavramını daha iyi anlayabilmektir. Bunun için, sorulara içtenlikle cevap vermeniz çok önemlidir.

Çalışmada yer alan öğretim elemanlarının ismi kesinlikle gizli tutulacaktır. Toplanan bilgiler sadece bilimsel amaçlar için kullanılacaktır.

Bu çalışmaya yapacağınız değerli katkılar için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Ümit Özkanal

Nadire Arıkan

**Uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz.**

**Bölüm I: Kişisel Bilgiler**

**A. Cinsiyetiniz:** 1. Kadın ( )        2. Erkek ( )

**B. Yaşınız:**        1. 25- 30 ( )        2. 31-35 ( )        3. 36-40 ( )        4. 40 üzeri ( )

**C. Medeni durumunuz:** 1. Bekar ( )        2. Evli ( )        3. diğer ( )

**D. Çocuk sayısı:** 1. Yok ( )        2. 1 tane ( )        3. 2 tane ( )        4. 3 ve üzeri ( )

**Bölüm II: Mesleki Bilgiler**

**A. Eğitim durumunuz:**

1. Lisans: Üniversite / Bölüm:_____Yıl:_____

2. Yüksek Lisans: Üniversite / Bölüm:_____Yıl:_____

3. Doktora: Üniversite / Bölüm:_____Yıl:_____

**B. Meslekte çalışma süreniz**: 1. 2–4 yıl ( )        2. 5–10 yıl ( )        3. 11–15 yıl ( )        4. 16- 20 yıl ( )

**C. Haftalık ders yükünüz:**  1. 12–14 saat ( )        2. 15- 18 saat ( )        3. 19- 22 saat ( )

4. 23- 26 saat ( )        5. 27 saat ve üzeri ( )

**D. Pozisyonunuz:** 1. Öğretmen ( )        2. İdareci ( )        3. Gurup sorumlusu ( )        4. Ofis sorumlusu ( )

**E. Şu anki mesleğinizde stres düzeyiniz**: 1. yok ( )        2. az ( )        3. ortalama ( )

4. yüksek ( )        5. çok yüksek ( )        6. aşırı ( )

| | | Hiçbir Zaman | Çok Nadiren | Nadiren | Bazen | Genellikle | Çok Sık | Her Zaman |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | İşimden duygusal olarak uzaklaştığımı hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 2. | İş gününün sonunda kendimi bitkin hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 3. | Sabahları uyanıp diğer bir işgünü ile karşılaşmak zorunda olduğumda kendimi yorgun hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 4. | Öğrencilerimin neler hissettiklerini kolayca anlayabilirim. | | | | | | | |
| 5. | Bazı öğrencilerime kişiliği olmayan nesnelermiş gibi davrandığımı hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 6. | Bütün gün insanlarla çalışmak benim için gerçekten bir gerginliktir. | | | | | | | |
| 7. | Öğrencilerimin sorunları ile çok etkin bir biçimde ilgilenirim. | | | | | | | |
| 8. | İşimin beni tükettiğini hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 9. | İşim nedeni ile diğer insanların yaşamlarını olumlu yönde etkilediğimi hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 10. | Bu mesleğe girdiğimden beri insanlara karşı daha katı oldum. | | | | | | | |
| 11. | Bu mesleğin beni duygusal olarak katılaştırmasından endişe duyuyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 12. | Kendimi çok enerjik hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 13. | İşimin beni hayal kırıklığına uğrattığını hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 14. | İşimde çok sıkı çalıştığımı hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 15. | Bazı öğrencilere ne olduğu umurumda değil. | | | | | | | |
| 16. | Doğrudan insanlarla çalışmak bende aşırı gerginlik yapıyor | | | | | | | |
| 17. | Öğrencilerime rahat bir atmosferi kolayca oluşturabilirim. | | | | | | | |
| 18. | Öğrencilerimle yakın olduğum bir çalışmadan sonra kendimi neşeli hissederim. | | | | | | | |
| 19. | Bu meslekte birçok değerli işler başardım. | | | | | | | |
| 20. | Kendimi çaresiz hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |
| 21. | İşimde duygusal sorunlarla soğukkanlılıkla ilgilenirim. | | | | | | | |
| 22. | Öğrencilerimin bazı sorunlarından dolayı beni suçladıklarını hissediyorum. | | | | | | | |

Table 1. Are there any differences between the burnout levels in terms of instructors' personal factors?

| | EE | D | LPA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0.101344 | 0.114877 | -0.23061 |
| Age | -0.0103 | 0.067295 | -0.11488 |
| Marital status | 0.230456 | 0.170336 | -0.26716 |
| No. of children | -0.08337 | -0.08286 | -0.00306 |

Table 2. Are there any differences between the burnout levels in terms of instructors' educational backgrounds?

| | EE | D | LPA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational Background | 0.116578 | 0.045972 | 0.029677 |

Table 3. Are there any differences between the burnout levels in terms of work related factors?

| | EE | D | LPA |
|---|---|---|---|
| Years of Experience | 0.005671 | -0.10219 | -0.03451 |
| Weekly work load | -0.36416 | -0.46132 | 0.242562 |
| Position | 0.254649 | 0.329777 | -0.40105 |
| Perceived stress level | 0.828568 | 0.467379 | -0.48795 |

# Using High Level Upperclass Undergraduates as TAs in Large Lower Division EFL Classes

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to offer a feasible way to show that the problem of large EFL courses for lower division can be solved by the use of high level upperclass undergraduates as teaching assistants in and out of class. The use of UTAs fragments the large class into seemingly small classes with view to stimulating interest and effective learning outcomes in large classes. The paper discusses how to apply UTAs in large EFL classes from the aspects of selecting, training, and using UTAs. It also makes an objective appraisal of the use of UTAs in a large class.

**Keywords:** Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA), Large English Class, Lower division

## I. Introduction

Since the late 20th century, and early 21st century, with the increase of the enrollment and teaching cost, class size has been going up. Another commonplace phenomenon prevailing in the schools of higher education is the merge of two or more classes into one attending the same course due to the shortage of the course teacher. The number of the students after the merge of classes in attending certain lessons increases to 50—70, even over 100 in some non-English major English classes.

Professor Gu (2001) from Beijing Foreign Studies University holds the view that, if the number of a class exceeds 40 students, it can be classified into the large class. The world-famous English teaching expert Harmer(2000) also thinks that a class has over 30 or 50 students can be regarded as a large class.

The large English classes common on most college campuses pose a particular challenge to teachers, for language learning requires a more personal contact between the teacher and students and more opportunities for students to practice their acquired language skills. Lectures are generally described from the teacher's point of view, and the student's need for interaction with the teacher is not addressed. In fact, lack of interaction is considered one of the major limitations of the traditional lecture (Munson, 1992). The large, impersonal lecture format simply cannot accommodate the broad range of student differences, for the size of the course mitigates against personal attention to specific students needs (Friedlander and Kerns, 1998). Furthermore, when students have copies of the lecture notes or a text, a significant percentage would prefer reading them rather than attending classes that offer little or no interaction (Sullivan and McIntosh, 2002).

Consequently, the teachers find it hard to teach well in a large class with lack of effective communication between students and teachers, even the simplest teaching method of Ask and Answer cannot be carried out effectively, for most probably it involves only a couple of students. Generally the teaching mode of a large class tends to be a lecture with a teacher dominating the whole class, a lecture with neither response, nor interaction, nor discussion. Gradually, students come to lose interest in the subject, absent-minded, chatting, doing their own things, not to say falling asleep, which in turn discourages the teacher and results in the deterioration of the teaching effect. Scholars and teaching staff both at home and abroad have been exploring a more effective, scientific pedagogy to improve the teaching in a large class.

One of the most dramatic course innovations of a large class was the use of an organizational simulation or game. The major advantage of games and simulations was that students were active participants rather than passive observers (Mallor, et al., 1981). In colleges and universities, efforts are underway to transform the classroom from a lecture-based experience to a more active and demanding one for students (Matthews, Cooper, Davidson, and Hawkes, 1995). Web-based learning could meet individual needs, motivate students to find resources, and to publish with a creative mind. It also promoted cooperation and collaboration amongst faculty and students (Hanson and Jubeck, 1999). AUTC Project 2001 in Australia also reported (2002) web-based activities were described covering the full range of disciplines, to structure or enhance students' learning in large classes. Christopher (2003) also discussed how the web was used as an instructional tool in large classes to motivate students to find resources, conduct webquests, complete time certain email assignments, and engage in active in-class discussions.

Recently in China, the research on teaching mode of large classes has also been done. The following viewpoints are representative. In a large class, incentive mechanism and competitive mechanism could be applied in group discussion (Liu, 2001). A "communication-aimed and student-centered" new concept should be cherished and the "student-centered topic-based approach" implemented (Wang and Yu, 2003). The large-class College English teaching model should take the form of teaching with the network students-centered independent learning as its feature (Xiong, 2006). Wang (2006) in his essay on teaching Chinese-English translation in a large class stressed the combination of individual and group practice before class with intensive instruction by the teacher in class, with a view to the actual requirements of their future jobs. Based on constructivism theory, self-learning and collaborative learning were also widely carried out in large classes in China (Zheng and Zheng, 2008).

No doubt, these teaching methods mentioned above are effective to some extent, realizing the purpose of activating most students inside class or outside class, but they have a common weakness—lack of the monitoring and tutoring system, which inevitably would end up in failure, for there is only one single teacher in charge of a large class who is unable to be responsive to each student in the process of studying under the instruction of these pedagogies.

The prevailing opinion is that attributed to Phil Wankat: "anything you can do in a large class you can do better in a small one" (Felder, 1997). However, we cannot change the class size. What measures can we take to perfect teaching in a large English class? The introduction of Upperclass UTAs (for convenience, in the following sections UTAs is used to refer to Upperclass undergraduate teaching assistants) may be a feasible solution to this problem. In this essay, UTAs are the focus of the whole teaching program rather than GTAs (graduate teaching assistants), for UTAs are more practical in implementation in average schools of higher education in China where English major graduates are probably unavailable.

Why is UTA applied in lower division English class? For lower division students are lacking in learning experience and skills at college, and they can learn a lot from UTAs in order to adapt themselves to college study within a short period of time. Besides, UTAs are only in a position to assist the lower division students.

Fragmented by UTAs, a large class practically turns into small classes or small seminars. This pedagogy can energize students in the courses, especially introductory courses (either English or Chinese) common on campuses, through the innovative use of UTAs, making students more active and engaged learners, and giving students in large classes a greater sense of belonging by creating a community of learners. The detailed operation will be illustrated in the following sections.

## 2. Using UTA in big classes

It is a common practice that TA (teaching assistant) is widely used not only in colleges, universities but also in high schools or primary schools in such well-developed countries as the U.K. and the U.S., where there are TA training centers or programs for TAs. TA has become a professional occupation on the market.

TA is not a prevailing practice in China. There are only a small portion of graduate students who work as TAs in college schools and assist undergraduate classes. However, in the average college schools, most of them are not entitled to enroll English-major graduates. In China, it is more practical to use high-level undergraduates of English specialty to solve the problems of large English classes.

*2.1 Selecting UTAs*

What students are qualified for TAs or what are eligibility requirements on UTAs? Prerequisite is that they have taken the course which they are going to assist, often given by the same professor or lecturer. Generally, an undergraduate who has done well in this course in a previous semester can serve as an excellent resource for other students.

Secondly, they are good at communication and expression. They must be able to communicate effectively with students and teachers. Thirdly, their own academic study must be guaranteed, for they are studying their own undergraduate courses in order to gain enough credit points for graduation. Finally, they must demonstrate initiative and a willingness to follow a teacher's directions.

Take the course of Survey of English-speaking Countries for example. Undergraduates usually take this course in the second academic year. Typically this course is given by way of large lectures, that is, two or more classes attend the lecture at one time. (It is the same case with other introductory courses including linguistics, American and British literature, Business English and the like.) Before this course is given, the course teacher should choose some UTA candidates from the former students who have already studied it and have done well in it, and arrange an interview for them together with some teaching peers to select three to five in accordance with the size of the class. Roughly, each TA is in charge of 10 to 15 students. During the interview, a scoring guide may be used to help the selection. The aim of the interview is to assess their communicative English ability, for UTAs' main work is to help the course teacher to carry out the task-based teaching programs in the form of group discussion in large classes, so their communicative ability is essential in addition to their previous excellent testing results.

*2.2 Training UTAs*

After the UTAs are determined, teachers of the corresponding courses may give lessons to the UTAs, informing them of the requirements and detailed procedures of the courses. The training can be conducted as described.

A short course should be offered to UTAs either on weekends or a week right after the summer vacation begins. The training syllabus covers general topics of importance, including grading, recording, and leading discussions. The purpose is let the UTAs have a rough idea of what teaching is and how teaching program is planned and implemented, what role they will play in and out of class, what and how they should do in practice.

Then, teachers provide teaching strategies from the perspective of a particular course.

Last, a trial teaching should be simulated with aid of a class of students.

The training program helps high level undergraduate students well prepared for the role of TA in a certain course in the coming semester.

Besides, all the UTAs profiles should be kept by the Student Affairs Department for supervising the job they are doing and also ensuring that they are not overtaxed with teaching responsibilities.

*2.3 Applying UTAs in a Large Class*

In a large class of 60 students, the number of UTAs is supposed to 3—4. In this way, the class can be divided into 4 groups with 15 students each. In other words, the large class is turned into 4 seminars, each with one UTA.

Serving as true assistants to a large class, UTAs usually perform all or part of the following duties:

(a) Provide individual or small group tutoring.

(b) Monitor and/or provide feedback on the academic progress of assigned students.

(c) Assist in the development of general study skills as well as those related to the specific area of study.

(d) Offer academic strategies for meeting special learning needs of select students.

(e) Help the teacher maintain classroom discipline.

(f) Grade homework assignments and examinations.

The following steps are the detailed procedures of applying UTAs in a large class of Survey of English–speaking Countries with the lecture entitled American Two Party System and General Election. The large class was divided into groups of 15 students on the basis of the dorm. One dorm had 4-5 on the average. The adjacent dorms made up a group, which provided convenience both to the UTA and the gathering of the students for out-of-class discussion.

Pre-class discussion. A week before the lecture, the teacher assigned a discussion topic "Why could Barrack Obama defeat John MacCain in the 2008 general election?" With this assignment, the students would hunt for relevant information by all means. During this period the UTAs should participate in the preparation for the topic, providing individual or group tutoring concerning how to search, select and summarize the related materials in accordance with the instructions of the teacher and former experience they had when they studied this course. At the same time, they kept track of the students' preparation and provided the teacher with feedback on the fulfillment of the assignment. The UTAs' record of the students' performance could be used for the final grading of the students' study.

Class presentation. This stage took up 20 minutes or so including 5 minutes for commentation. In class, before the teacher gave the lecture, the speaker(s) of one or two groups presented their achievement in the form of PPT or spoken English. Based on the presentation, the other groups made supplementary remarks on this topic with a UTA in charge of each group, for students usually do not take active part or just keep silent in the group discussion under the monitor of their peers. At that time, UTAs played the role of a teacher, guiding the commentation on the presentation and asking one of the students to jot down every group member's viewpoints. In this way, all the students were energized and involved in the activity, which to some extent eliminated the passiveness of some students. Then UTAs or the speakers of each group spoke out the additional information or different viewpoints. Thus the whole class shared the full information offered by their peers. The teacher might ask UTAs to make comments on the performance of each group, enabling students to be more aware of the procedure of assignment fulfillment and improving their study next time. Finally, the teacher summed up the class presentation and evaluated each group's performance.

Lecture. This stage also took up 15 minutes or so. Traditionally, in a large class "cramming" or "force-feeding" method of teaching is inevitably used. They fail to give more students the opportunity to answer questions or express their viewpoints on a certain subject, which unavoidably puts students in a passive position, encourages poor work habits and leads to the evaluation system to be more based on the students' marks or results.

By using UTAs, the "cramming" time can be greatly reduced in a large class. Take the trial practice of using UTAs in the above-mentioned course for example. After presentation and commentation, the teacher spent 15 minutes making a

general introduction of the chapter, say, American Two Party System and General Election, of ideologies and traditions of the two major political parties and electoral system in the U.S. Then each group began to discuss and explained to the class one of the following questions designed by the teacher on US two-party dominance:

Why does America still have a Two-party system?

What's the effect of the electoral system?

What's the respective ideology of democrats/republicans?

Is the 'one party' system idea feasible?

During the PPT- aided lecture, the UTAs could review the materials given by the teacher and solidify their thoughts in order to help students in later discussion.

Group Discussion. This stage took up 10 minutes or so. Now it was time for UTAs to play the key role in class. As described above, a class of 60 students needed 3-4 UTAs. In the case of 3, the teacher should be in charge of one of the groups. If 4, the teacher could have the chance to move around monitoring all group activities.

Each group was subdivided into 3 small groups. The UTA monitored, guided and instructed     each subgroup. For example, a group with the second topic could ask the UTA more about the electoral system if they still did not understand the electoral system. If the UTA failed to explain, he or she could turn to the teacher. More practically, the UTA with their grasped knowledge might help the students tackle the problems of expressing themselves in English, for the students were probably lacking in relevant technical terms. The UTA helped the group sum up the viewpoints of all the subgroups at the end of the group discussion. In the process of the discussion, the teacher played the role of monitoring the whole large class and gave necessary help to any group and also managed or controlled the time. After about 10 minutes' discussion, each group recommended a speaker (all the group members took turns to be a speaker.) In accordance with the order of the questions, each speaker took their turn to present the view of their group. Each presentation was followed by two or three commentators and further explanation and evaluation from the teacher. The presentation of this stage was carried out in the second period of the class. In this case, the students could make use of the break time to prepare for it.

In the form of presentation and prompt commentation, the teacher fulfils the teaching schedule and succeeds in activating all the students with the aid of UTAs.

Evaluation. The teacher evaluated the students' performance as a speaker in class from the four aspects: sentence organization, language fluency, idea clarity and logic solidity. Each item accounted for 25 points. Together with the detailed reports from UTAs on the students' preparation for the assigned subject outside class, the teacher gave each student a relatively fair evaluation of their daily learning performance. Since the teaching stressed the process not the final exam results, the grading of the process – information collection, discussion, presentation and commentation was put on priority, which took up at least half of the total score.

*2.4 The Reward of UTAs*

Unlike professors and GTAs, UTAs generally do not have a fixed salary but instead they can be paid by the hour, earn credit hours, or volunteer their time. No doubt, the rewarding system should be approved by the school authority.

## 3. Self-appraisal of the effect of using UTAs

*3.1 The Integration of Many Learning Methods*

Just as Heterick and Twigg point out redesigns which create more active learning environments can lead to real gains in learning (1999). The use of UTAs integrates many learning methods such as active learning, collaborative learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning-- make large classes more engaging and interesting for both student and teacher. The interactive process allows students to reflect on their learning experiences, facilitating a higher order of learning. The interactive process promotes good communication abilities and effective interpersonal skills, while introducing and/or enhancing their research skills. The students attend class; they are more accountable to their course of study, their peers, and their assignments.

*3.2 Advantages of Virtual Small Classes*

As is known to the teaching professionals, small class sizes are to have many advantages over large ones. Much more individual attention can be given to each student. This is the crux of the matter, and illustrates why private tutoring is so sought after. The seemingly small classes also possess the advantages of the real small classes.

a. Aided by UTAs, the teacher is well informed of needs and interests of the students, making them more interested in the lessons, and thus more willing to learn.

b. Monitored and helped by UTAs, any student having difficulty with a particular lesson is less likely to fall through the cracks.

c. Working as missionaries or representatives of the teacher, UTAs foster better student/teacher relations. UTAs are sure to get well acquainted with all the students of their respective groups quickly. With UTAs' frequent contact with their groups and regular reports on each group member's study and interest, the teacher seems to be accessible and responsive. Such a relationship makes it much more likely for a student to seek help from the teacher, when needed.

d. More in depth assignments can be given. A teacher teaching a class of 100 rather than 15 or 20 is unlikely to assign more than one comprehensive paper (and rarely even that), is much more likely to rely on multiple choice exams rather than essays, and cannot give nearly as much feedback to each student. When people learn deeply, they construct their own understanding of what something means, how it might be applied, what its implications are, and so forth. Outstanding teachers help students construct, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate meaning. They do not just try to pour information in students' ears (Johnson et al., 1998). With the assistance of UTAs, the chance of for an average teacher to become an outstanding one is not always slim.

f. Smaller groups encourage participation more than large ones. Large classes rarely have any discussion whatsoever, and when they do it is very easy for students not to be involved. The quieter students or those who are less prepared can easily 'hide' behind the more vocal or better prepared students. In a small class one cannot hide and hope to be overlooked. Participation is often mandatory.

g. It is easier to get students to speak up in discussions in front of smaller groups than larger ones. Moreover, with the guidance and help of UTAs, students are more likely to feel at ease when expressing their own viewpoints.

h. More pressure to attend class, as one's absence would not go unnoticed, for each virtual small class is under the charge of a UTA.

On the other hand, the virtual small classes also have the advantages of a large class, which is beneficial to the students in the class. According to Andrew Schlafly (2008), large classes are better for the following reasons such as students can learn from more ideas and insights; students can acquire better experience at speaking in front of large groups with more students.

*3.3 The Benefit of Working as a UTA*

Working as a part-time UTA may bring about many benefits. The greatest benefit may be the experience of transitions between student life and professional world

UTAs as students, they are aware of their own positions where they are supposed to help students, and never make themselves difficult to approach. They serve as a moderator between students and teachers. In this way, they can learn how to get along well with both students and teachers, which is beneficial to their management of interpersonal relationships. And as teaching assistants, they can learn more from their teachers about the whole teaching procedure. They learn to provide instructional and clerical support for classroom teachers, assist junior students in learning class material using the teacher's lecture plans, providing students with individualized attention. The experience of working as paraeducators or paraprofessionals will be instructive to their future work, especially to those UTAs who will take education as their future career. In a word, being a UTA may result in favorable job prospects.

**4. Suggestions on maintaining relationships with UTAs**

Maintaining a good relationship with UTAs is the guarantee of successful accomplishment of teaching procedures in a large class. Suggestions are given in the form of second person for convenience.

a. You (the teacher of a large English class) should make your expectations clear at the beginning of the semester. Getting off to a good start is critical. The following kinds of questions should be taken into consideration: What are the course objectives, and how do you intend to work with TAs to fulfill these objectives? More specific issues to address might include: What kinds of student questions and situations do you want to handle yourself, and what kinds would you like the TA to handle (or at least have a first try)? Do you expect TAs to regularly attend lectures in the classes they assist?

b. Maintain close contact with UTAs throughout the semester. Consider meeting formally with them at regular intervals-- meetings before giving major exams, collecting big assignments, or introducing difficult concepts. Here are some questions that you may need to discuss with UTAs as the semester progresses. What are the ground rules for responding to student work? What criteria will be used for evaluating specific assignments?

c. Facilitate the flow of feedback. Provide a forum to encourage UTAs to keep you informed of what students already know and what they are having difficulty understanding. Similarly, provide UTAs with regular feedback on the work they are doing.

d. Help UTAs balance their work for you with their own study. Ask them to keep track of their hours and to let you know when the workload exceeds expectations. You may need to make slight adjustments in what you're asking of UTAs.

e. Sit in on at least one of each UTA's discussion group during the course of the semester. (You will get feedback on students' learning as well as provide guidance to your UTAs on their instruction.)

f. Share your experience: give UTAs tips on how to get students actively involved in a discussion or problem-solving session.

Absolutely, there are many alternative ways to maintain a good relationship with UTAs in response to the practical situation. But above all, the teacher should value the work UTAs are doing and keep close contact with them in order to assign them tasks and give necessary instructions.

## 5. Conclusion

Thanks to the involvement of UTAs, the students indicated positive reactions to group discussions and class presentations. This UTA-aided pedagogy proved to be highly effective in increasing interaction among students. It makes a large English class possess the advantages of a small class, guaranteeing most of the lower division students' active participation in class. UTAs' knowledge of the course, familiarity with the institution, and proximity to their peers allow them to play an important and unique role both in and out of the classroom. They guide students' discussions and presentations, record students' learning procedures and their performance, grade their short assignments, provide the teacher with the most credible feedback from the students and help the teacher improve the teaching effect. In a word, using UTAs in a large class is not only beneficial to the students, but the course teacher and UTAs themselves as well. This pedagogy can also be applied to serve other courses. However, the implement of it cannot detach from the support of school authority, for many concerned matters have to be approved by it like credit earning and class arrangements to warrant UTAs' normal study and their benefit.

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# Strategies for Preventing and Resolving Temporary Fossilization in Second Language Acquisition

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**Abstract**

Based on the practice of college English teaching and learning in China, the paper reviews the phenomenon and causes of the temporary fossilization in second language acquisition and offers some corresponding strategies for preventing and surmounting the obstacles in the hope of promoting the reactivation of   the next climax.

**Keywords**: Second language acquisition, Temporary fossilization, Strategies

## 1. Introduction

**I**n the early period of implementation of the policy of opening China to the outside world when many English teachers of China   paid great attention to the puzzling   phenomenon: "New Concept English" and "English 900"enjoyed great popularity in China and they were used as the textbook in   many English training institutions. They used to be broadcast constantly by TV and radio stations and many parents regarded seeing movies and imitating tapes as an important way for guiding children in their English learning. For a time, the two prevailing books evoked people's desire for English knowledge. However, in retrospect, people found that only few had a good mastery of English in the wake of having finished learning them. Why? As college English teachers, the authors attempt to make a preliminary probe into the causes for the above phenomenon from psycholinguistic aspects, of which, we believe that temporary fossilization is the greatest obstacle in second language acquisition, and to take corresponding measures positively is a good way for us to prevent and resolve temporary fossilization so as to raise the efficiency of our English teaching work.

**Fossilization** Selinker (1970) noted that most L2 learners fail to reach target language competence. That is, they stop learning when their internalized rule system contains rules different from those of the target language. This is referred to as 'fossilization'.

**Intelanguage** Interlanguage is the term coined by Selinker (1972) to refer to the systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent of both the learner's first language and the target language. The term has come to be used with different but related meanings: (1) to refer to the series of interlocking systems which characterize acquisition, (2) to refer to the system that is observed at a single stage of development (i.e. ' an interlanguage') ,and (3) to refer to particular mother tongue/target language combination (e.g. French mother tongue/English target language vs German mother tongue/English target language).

**Temporary fossilization** It refers to the stagnant process in which non-target factors are fixed in the target language to a certain stage. Research shows only 5% can reach the target language while 95% can't. This kind of phenomenon is called temporary interlanguage fossilization.

## 2. Causes of temporary fossilization

The research of the emergence, developmental process analysis and interlanguage fossilization shows that foreign language learning is a kind of skill learning in essence. However, "plateau phenomenon" is the common phenomenon and the rule of skill learning, that is, the initial learning ability of learners draws in a linear increase, and to a certain stage, it will be in stagnant, then the ability curve shows flatly or even in decline. This plateau phenomenon can be found in interlanguage developmental process of Chinese learners. The learners will reach another peak after receiving an optimal input and their linguistic ability will realize a second leap, such as living and learning in the English-speaking countries. Analyses on the temporality of interlanguage fossilization help to overcome those obstacles. Many scholars analyzed the cause of fossilization and separated fossilization into personal and general factors.

*Personal factors* such as those identified by Schumann and Schumann are difficult to observe by a third person. This methodological problem has been solved by two ways. First one is to use of diary studies. The second solution to the

methodological problem is to use questionnaires and interviews with individual learners. Personal factors are by definition heterogeneous, it can be grouped together as: (1) Group dynamics, group dynamics seem to be important in classroom SLA. Bailey (1983) records in some detail the anxiety and competitiveness experienced by a number of diarists. Some classroom learners make overt comparisons of themselves with other learners. In another kind of comparison, learners math how they think they are progressing against their expectations. Often these comparisons result in emotive responses to the language-learning experience. Competitiveness may be manifested in a desire to out-do other language learners by shouting out answers in class, or by racing through examinations to be the first to finish. However, once group dynamics transfers at the negative direction, students will feel anxious and shameful.

(2) Attitudes to the teacher and course materials, students will inevitably have very different views about the kind of teacher they think is best for them. Some prefer a teacher who, in Stevick's (1980)

Term, creates 'space' for them to pursue their own learning paths. Others prefer a teacher who structures the learning tasks much more tightly. Learns also vary in their attitudes to teaching materials. In general, adult learners dislike having a course book imposed upon them in a rigid way. They prefer a variety of materials and the opportunity to use them in ways they choose for themselves.

(3) Individual learning techniques, there is tremendous variety in the techniques employed by different learners.

*General factors which they consider are*

(1) Age, success in SLA also appears to be strongly related to the age when SLA is commenced. This is particularly the case where pronunciation is concerned.

(2) Intelligence and aptitude, learning a L2 in a classroom involves two sets of intellectual abilities, it involves what might be called 'a general academic or reasoning ability (Stern 1983:386'), often referred to as intelligence. This ability is involved in the learning of other school subjects as well as a L2; the other kind of ability consists of specific cognitive qualities needed for SLA, often referred to as aptitude.

(3) Cognitive style, cognitive style is a term used to refer to the manner in which people perceive, conceptualize, organize, and recall information. Each person is considered to have a more or less consistent mode of cognitive functioning.

(4) Attitudes and motivation, Schumann (1978) lists 'attitude' as a social factor on a par with variables such as 'size of learning group', and 'motivation' as an affective factor alongside 'culture shock'. Gardner and Lambert (1972) define 'motivation' in terms of the L2 learner's overall goal or orientation, and 'attitude' as the persistence shown by the learner in striving for a goal. Brown also distinguishes 'motivation' and 'attitudes'. He identifies three types of motivation: a), global motivation, which consists of a general orientation to the goal of learning a L2;   b), situational motivation, which varies according to the situation in which learning takes place(the motivation associated with classroom learning is distinct from the motivation involved in naturalistic learning);   c), task motivation, which is the motivation for performing particular learning tasks.

(5) Personality, one of the intuitively appealing hypotheses that has been investigated is that extroverted learners learn more rapidly and are more successful than introverted learns. It has been suggested that extroverted learns will find it easier to make contact with other users of the L2 and therefore will obtain more input.

In the process of second language leaning, all the factors listed above are likely to hold back the improvement of second language level to a degree. As an English teacher, out final purpose is not to find out the causes but to research the efficient measures to guide learners to develop towards in a positive direction.

## 3. Some strategies to overcome temporary fossilization

### 3.1 Taking a right attitude to students' mistakes

By research on interlanguage, People realized that making mistakes is not a sign of failure, but it is an inevitable phenomenon and teachers should "respect" students' errors, because it is a process that reaches the target language. Respecting errors does not mean taking no notice of them, but it does mean that they should not be treated as necessarily being evidence of stupidity, idleness or evil intent on the part of the learner. For example, when the foreign teachers correct the pronunciation, it is because there is no "equal" English phoneme in Chinese that they failed again and again.   The teachers might blame the students for their failure, saying "why you always pronounce it wrong" impatiently, which may result in hurting their confidence, in many cases, some students may even give up efforts to reach the target pronunciation. To others, the wrong pronunciations will be reserved in the interlanguage. Instead, the teachers should take a developmental attitude to students' errors and mistakes, blame them less and encourage them more. This helps students to work on mentality of being afraid of making mistakes. Understanding that not only helps learners to overcome the psychological fear of mistakes, enhance the self-confidence to learn a foreign language, but also helps teachers take a correct attitude toward students' mistakes, facilitate them to analyze these mistakes and

develop corresponding teaching approaches and teaching tasks so as to    correct errors, reduce errors, thereby reducing the occurrence of fossilization.

### 3.2 stimulating the students' motivation to learn a foreign language

The English majors can reach the communicative purpose after one or two year's systematic learning with a certain degree of communicative skill and strategies. At this time, on one hand, the teachers should stimulate their motivation by different kinds of methods, make them not content with their present level and continue to learn about target language actively. In this way, students' interlanguage is stimulated by motivation and continued to get closer to target language. On the other hand, teachers should consider of difficulty of the task, intensity and challenging to the learners as well as independent learning and the ability of making judgments to ensure that students can complete the tasks and remain a certain degree of interest but not anti-climax.

### 3.3 Paying attentions to verbal output and grasping the relationship between accuracy and fluency

The development of interlanguage requires both optimal input and output, systematic ability can be developed and assumption can be tested through output, so as to make the language into automatic mechanism, thus promoting the development of interlanguage. Generally speaking, the English majors practice more writing output than verbal output, therefore, attention should be paid to the learner's oral output. In training student's oral ability, teachers should grasp the relationship between accuracy and fluency. Guided by communicative teaching approach, many teachers used to focus on the fluency and ignore the errors and accuracy. Practice shows that in premature pursuit of fluency is harmful to the development of language of learners. Between the two, the accuracy should in be the first place. In oral teaching activities, teachers should guide students to focus on language accuracy, requiring students to express meaning in the form of monitoring and encourage them to correct or amend once they are aware of errors.

### 3.4 Giving strategic feedback

Carefully designed feedback can prevent the formation of fossilization effectively. Teachers should provide timely feedback after learners complete a learning task. According to interactive feedback of Vigil and Oller, the best one is the combination of positive emotional feedback and negative cognitive feedback. The former encourages and stimulates students to continue to learn while the latter tells learners to make some changes and modifications.

### 3.5 Stimulating students' imagination and paying attention to their creativity.

In human brain's cognitive structure, each student has developed a set of cognitive schemata, teachers can help students to restructuring these known schema. In other words, teachers stimulate students to develop a special ability of using the known schema to express unknown meaning, which can train their creative thinking and divergent thinking.

### 3.6 Encouraging learns to become a good language learner from the following aspects

1) Being able to respond to the group dynamics of the learning situations so as not develop negative anxiety and inhibitions;

2) Seeking out all opportunities to use and practice the target language;

3) Making maximum use of the opportunities afforded to practice listening to and responding to speech in the L2 addressed to him and to others-----this will involve attending to meaning rather than to form;

4) Supplementing the learning that derives from direct contact with speakers of the L2 with learning derived from the use of study techniques (such as making vocabulary lists)----this is likely to involve attention to form;

5) Being an adolescent or an adult rather than a young child, at least as far as the early stages of grammatical development are concerned;

6) Possessing sufficient analytic skills to perceive, categorize, and store the linguistic features of the L2 and also to monitor errors;

7) Possessing a strong reason for learning the L2 (which may reflect an integrative or an instrumental motivation) and also develop a strong 'task motivation'(i.e. respond positively to the learning tasks chosen or provided);

8) Being prepared to experiment by taking risks, even if this makes the learner appear foolish;

9) Being capable of adapting to different learning conditions.

## 4. Conclusion

At present, the waves of college English reform go ahead with full stream. Especially under the guidance of the National College English Curriculum Requirements, we have made the great changes in the terms of teaching approaches, learning style and effectiveness. But the reasons for the long-standing problem of "time-consuming and inefficient" needed to be excavated fundamentally and the advisable countermeasures should be found out. The author believes that the second language learner constitutes the main aspect of the contradiction; psychological factors are the

obstacles blocking the road to progress. The author and some colleagues are exploring the temporary fossilization, simultaneously, we are conduct empirical research in teaching practice for the purpose of bring the teachers' leading role into full play and helping students to prevent and overcome fossilized stage, and in the hope that our initial trial can arise resonance with common friends.

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# Teaching English Speaking and English Speaking Tests

# in the Thai Context: A Reflection from Thai Perspective

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**Abstract**

To successfully assess how language learners enhance their performance and achieve language learning goals, the four macro skills of listening, speaking reading and writing are usually the most frequently assessed and focused areas. However, speaking, as a productive skill, seems intuitively the most important of all the four language skills because it can distinctly show the correctness and language errors that a language learner makes. Since English speaking tests, in general, aim to evaluate how the learners express their improvement and success in pronunciation and communication, several aspects, especially speaking test formats and pronunciation need to be considered. To enhance Thai learners' English performance and the quality of the speaking tests, this paper has three principal objectives. First, this paper presents English language teaching, as well as teaching English speaking in the Thai context. Then, it highlights the significance of the test format as it is the main tool and indicator for scoring performance and analytic rating methods. Lastly, the paper addresses major problems found in the speaking tests to elucidate certain facts about learners' speaking ability and English instruction in the Thai context. Some pedagogical implications of the study are discussed for learning and teaching speaking to second or foreign language learners.

**Keywords:** English speaking ability, Thai learners, Teaching speaking skills

## 1. Introduction

In the world of globalization era, English has increasingly become the medium in every domain of communication, both in local and global contexts. As a result, the demand for speakers using English effectively is necessary in every country. Teaching and learning English, except for the native language, is thus crucial for communicative purposes to meet the demands of global economics and to cope with the growing local, national and international demands for English skills.

In Thailand, English is considered a foreign language, and is used for the purposes of academic advancement, career advancement, and traveling abroad. To cope with the growing local and international demand, a number of efforts from all parties involved have been made to the Thai educational system to help boost Thai learners' English performance. However, the National survey conducted by the Office of Educational Testing of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the Ministry of Education during the years of 1997 and 1998, showed that Thai learners, being assessed against standardized benchmarks of achievement, had unsatisfactory proficiency in the four skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking (Wiriyachitra, 2001). This result was repeatedly substantiated by more recent studies (e.g., Bolton, 2008; Bunnag, 2005a, 2005b), indicating that, based on the scores of two international standardized tests: TOEFL and TOEIC, Thai test takers' scores were significantly low, compared to those of Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, a focus on the development of literacy skills in English among Thai learners is central to language pedagogy.

Of all four key language skills, speaking is deemed to be the most important in learning a second or foreign language. As stated by Ur (1996), speaking included all other skills of knowing that language. In Thailand, the speaking skill is a critical part of language learning and the teaching process. In other words, it is extremely difficult for Thai learners to master the English language in terms of speaking and listening. This is because the medium of instruction in the classroom is mostly Thai, as many teachers teaching English to Thai learners are mainly non-native speakers, leading to the use of unnatural language and creating the failure of genuine interaction in the language classroom. Also, Thai learners in general have few chances to interact with English native speakers. The exposure to English of Thai learners is thus somewhat limited. That is why a lot of popular programs and foreign language teaching methods try to replicate the target language environment through immersion programs, bilingual school curricula, and computer-assisted teaching (Lapkin et al., 1990). However, the fact that many non-native speakers use the rating criteria based on native speakers' standards to measure learners' oral proficiency, according to Kim (2005), using this benchmark is not appropriate for the actual use of English in an international context. Therefore, it is

important for teachers and educators in general, and test designers in particular, to reconsider the purposes of English speaking tests, and the standards of assessing learners' speaking skills. Since a number of factors are responsible for limited success to speaking competence, this paper specifically aims to present teaching English speaking in the Thai context, and to explore the roles of speaking test formats and major problems of Thai learners found in speaking tests.

## 2. English Language Teaching in Thailand

To meet the demands of global economics, the Thai government has launched new initiatives in all domains of the educational system, including curriculum development, materials, and teaching and learning facilities, throughout the history of ELT in Thailand (Wongsothorn et al., 2003). To begin with, in 1895, English language was assigned to be studied as an optional subject taught in secondary schools. The major change occurred in 1909 when English was assigned to be studied in primary schools. Later in 1921, English became a compulsory subject for students beyond Grade 4. Aksornkul (1980) pointed out that the objectives of this change were twofold: to produce modern thinkers for the country, and to provide students with sufficient knowledge of English to be able to function in classroom.

There was a great change in the English syllabus for secondary schools in 1960. That is, English language was stated in the Upper Elementary Education Curriculum to be compulsory subject at the upper elementary level. Another major change was witnessed in the 1978 curriculum, which classified the English subject as optional again, and the subject was grouped together with Work Oriented Experience Area in the Special Experience Group. As for 1980 national curriculum, the English subject was classified as an elective in primary schools and compulsory subject from Grade 7 or in secondary schools.

Then, the revised English language curriculum was introduced in 1996. According to Khamkhien (2006), although English was still an elective in primary schools, the Thai government pushed a substantial effort, for every government school, to start learning English at Grade 1 onwards because there was a gap in terms of English standard between students studying English in private schools and those from government schools. The purpose of this revised proficiency-based curriculum was to provide students with the opportunity to continue their English education without interruption and to facilitate life-long learning. At this stage, the emphasis was placed on the development of the students' language proficiency to fulfill a number of purposes: communication, acquisition of knowledge, use of English in socio-cultural functions, career advancement, etc. In terms of approach to language teaching, functional-communicative approach with an eclectic orientation was focused.

The current English curriculum was revised and introduced in 2001 when the Ministry of Education introduced the national foreign language standard and benchmarks (Foley, 2005). The motivation for this revision was to be consistent with the changing world and globalization. With this change, the 2001 system integrated primary and secondary into a single stream, which was divided into four sub-levels: the Preparatory Level (Grades 1-3); the Beginning Level (Grades 4-6); the Expanding Level: (Grades 7-9); and Progressive Level (Grades 10-12). At this point, Foley (2005) asserted that an emphasis of this current English curriculum was placed on learner-centered culture and life-long learning through cognitive, emotional, affective, ethical, and cultural growths within the Thai context.

At the university level, both public and private Thai universities reformed English language curriculum in order to meet the demand for English language skills in the workplace. According to Foley (2005), English is now required for twelve credits instead of six in university education, namely, six in general English and the other six in English for academic or specific purposes. Moreover, Wongsothorn, Hiranburana and Chinnawongs (2003) reveal that the English curriculum in Thailand can be viewed as a paradigm shift from English as an elective to English as a compulsory subject, emphasizing independent work, autonomous learning, innovations and new technology in English language teaching (ELT), such as self-access learning, performance standards of general English as well as English for academic and specific purposes.

## 3. Teaching English Speaking in the Thai Context

Although substantial efforts have been made to the reform of English language curriculum in Thailand, Thai learners' English performance, as mentioned earlier, does not meet the standard required. In this regard, as pointed out by Foley (2005), factors responsible for limited success of ELT in Thailand include lack of proper curricula, dry teaching styles that overly focused on grammatical details, students, learning media, inappropriate texts, and testing and evaluation. Among all these factors, with regard to the aim of this paper which focuses on improving speaking skills of Thai learners of English, selecting appropriate teaching approaches and methods deserves our attention.

Since English in Thailand is taught as a foreign language, the exposure to English language is somewhat limited. As such, English instruction is located in an area where English is not a primary language. Moreover, the majority of English teachers are Thai in all levels of education—who are largely unqualified as teachers (Yunibandhu, 2004). As for teaching methodologies employed in the language classroom, traditionally, Thai EFL teachers employed the Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual methods in English classroom. Then, these two approaches were changed to correspond with the academic purposes and national educational reform as mentioned above along the history of

language teaching in Thailand.  In this case, educators and language teachers have sought and experimented with several teaching approaches to help learners learn language effectively such as task-based instruction, content-based approach and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).  In this regard, it seems that, in the teachers, educators, curriculum planners' perspectives, CLT is preferable and might be effective teaching approach as evidenced by a number of studies conducted in the Western countries (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Fotos, 2002; Saengboon, 2004; Snow, 2005).

Specifically with an English teaching approach, recently CLT has been promoted to meet curriculum reforms, revising teaching materials and improving teaching facilities for the attainment of communicative goals.  However, in Thailand it is deemed that CLT often fails to create sufficient opportunities for genuine interaction in the language classroom. This is because most of the Thai teachers are not familiar with the aural-oral method of CLT.  They would emphasize grammatical competence and provide learners with pattern drills and rote memorization of isolated sentences, creating incorrect language forms and limiting authentic speaking activities (Saengboon, 2004).  Interaction in the language classroom is mostly teacher-dominated, and learners are called upon primarily to provide factual responses, which is not genuine and authentic. This critical issue is witnessed by the study conducted by Bilasha and Kwangsawad (2004), illustrating that the teachers did not understand how to design speaking activities during practice and production. Further, the teachers had difficulty in selecting materials and activities that would match the learners' speaking ability and content (Kanoksilapatham, 2007).  The findings of these studies suggest that, to help Thai EFL teachers successfully adopt CLT in their classroom, they must understand CLT which requires a number of key supports in order to succeed at implementing communicative activities in their classrooms, and requires time to prepare materials for interactive activities.  Moreover, they should be able to connect the topics in the materials to what learners have already known in terms of their language skills, personal lives, and real world situations.   Therefore, it can be said that up to now English language teaching using CLT in Thailand has not prepared Thai learners for the changing world.  The idea that teachers should improve teaching competence, including testing and evaluation by promoting the communication approach needs to be revised.   In other words, Thai teachers should take responsibility for anticipating their problems and devising strategies to help their learners.

## 4. Significance of Speaking Test Formats

As mentioned earlier, CLT is deemed to be a supportive teaching approach with regard to teaching speaking to achieve communicative goals.  However, apart from the significance of selecting teaching approach in teaching English, this paper would not be complete without mentioning the choice of appropriate evaluation to meet the purposes of the teaching approach.  In this regard, test formats are focused as teaching can have an influence on learning and testing or washback-- the effects of testing on teaching and learning (Bailey, 2005).  The following cases describe some of the speaking test formats which can be observed in Thailand.

What is wrong with the speaking test formats that most Thai teachers use for measuring the speaking ability of their learners? Often times in Thailand, at a university level, speaking tests are included in language courses, especially in foundation courses. At this point, first, teachers themselves will determine test formats whether interviewing individuals or using situation-based settings is appropriate based on the focused content learners learned throughout the semester. As for the interviews, a wide variety of short written texts listed on a piece of paper is provided. Then, the learners need to speak out loud and answer some questions concerning the issue covered in the text. In addition, they will be interviewed, asking a series of questions, probably about general or current issues or contents they learned in class.

Another speaking test format in need of consideration is that, at some institutes the learners will be divided into groups of two or three for the speaking tests.  Then they will randomly select or draw a topic provided by their classroom teachers. These topics are somewhat related to the contents or situations they learned from the class. About five to ten minutes are allocated for planning and preparing a dialogue concerning such a topic they randomly selected, and then they are required to perform their dialogue and act out to the teachers.

The other case of speaking test formats frequently used in Thailand is that teachers will provide learners with written slips including both instruction and language function requesting, ordering and asking for options that learners have to follow and speak out in order to ask their counterpart. However, these instructions describing what the learners have to speak are provided in Thai, and thus they have to intuitively and simultaneously translate all the instructions and create their own sentences based on those language functions into English for their friends. At this juncture, the slips used in the advanced course for learners will provide instructions and language functions in English, aiming the learners to elaborate their answer to facilitate understanding for their peers, and to keep conversations going on.

Based on the above mentioned, an eminent question emerges: how does the test format affect the results of the test? Several factors are responsible for the success and failure, particularly the written slips used in the tests. What is wrong with the above case of the test formats? Yes, all of them are practical, facilitating learners' understanding of what they have to do in the test, but other pertinent questions arise:

- *Do the instructions and language functions need to be provided in Thai?*

- *How can the output from the learners be natural or authentic given that they have a chance to prepare before taking the test?*

- *How can the conversation be natural, representing a real interaction since they have enough time to prepare their dialogue?*

- *Does the choice of teaching approach reflect and reinforce the idea of test formats?*

Taken together, teaching and learning English skills in the Thai classroom, at all times, are difficult to manage for a long time due to a number of reasons as previously illustrated. As mentioned earlier, most instructors consider that CLT is the most appropriate approach employed in managing an English classroom. Textbooks are also adopted and used as a mainstream of these courses, providing topics and particular language functions. In this sense, learners will be trained and practice speaking skills with a concentration in linguistic knowledge and language use or pragmatics through English. Therefore, most extracts, examples and contexts are also presented in English when teaching. However, given the slips translated in Thai, another question emerges:

- *Is this practice followed and does it serve the choice of selected language teaching approach?*

- *If the rating criteria used in the test focus on grammar, range of vocabulary, fluency and accuracy, are the choice of instruction and the test formats suitable?*

In this regard, Yang and Xu (2001) stated that, when English is taught as a skill to practice, then the classroom often provides the learner with an artificial environment; the world surrounding the learner is not drawn on for interaction, input, or feedback in the target language. Therefore, it can be said that CLT in Thailand often fails to create sufficient opportunity for genuine interaction in the language classroom.

From the above cases, the test results also revealed that most of the Thai learners have the interference of the first language (L1), Thai, during the tests. A large volume of potential problematic words and meanings lead to misunderstanding and communication breaks down because of inadequate lexical items and the exposure to English in a real situation. In addition, the misconceptions regarding the notion of the relationship between teaching method and evaluation prevail. The subsequent section presents major problems found in the speaking tests.

## 5. Major Problems Found in the Speaking Tests

This section illustrates how Thai learners' English speaking abilities, particularly in forming questions and giving their responses are illuminated. It also describes the learners' pronunciation is as it should be prioritized in the speaking test. Some observations and the effects of mispronunciation such as communication breaks down and the roles of turn-taking are also discussed.

*5.1 Pronunciation*

Pronunciation is one of major problems claimed to be impeding or contributing to the lack of speaking competence of Thai learners. This is because English has a distinct set of sounds, while Thai does not. To successfully learn another language, particularly to achieve the target-like pronunciation and minimize foreign accents that can result from a negative L1 transfer, learners need to know what sounds are available in the target language but not in their own mother tongue, and vice versa.

As observed from the speaking tests, there are certain aspects that should be taken into consideration. First, although pronunciation is focused and practiced a lot in class during the lesson, a number of learners could not perform on reading aloud. It was found that their articulation was problematic, leading to misunderstanding by the listeners. It seemed that there were a lot of sounds that were difficult for them to pronounce correctly. For example, as was always the case, the letter *h* and *s* are problematic for most Thai learners due to their absence in the Thai language. Therefore, the initial sounds in the words *"think, although, them,* and *the"* are often mispronounced in the tests. As for the final sound, the word *"How much"* is often pronounced *"*How mud"*.

Taken together, most of the learners could not pronounce or mispronounce a series of words, resulting in misunderstanding in conversation. As noticed, most of the learners read a paragraph from a slip without understanding the meanings of what they were reading. That is, most of them read word by word without intonation, pauses or stress. Therefore, the knowledge of phonetics is a must and is needed in the instruction at the beginning of the course. Thai teachers should focus on pronunciation or on word level before going beyond communication in English. Moreover, the teachers have to raise learners' awareness and the importance of pronunciation both in word and sentence level in order to avoid communication breaks down or misunderstanding as a result of mispronunciation, inappropriate lexical items, and lack of pragmatic knowledge as conceived by the interlocutor.

*5.2 Authentic or Natural Communication*

Language, be it spoken or written, is complex, reflecting an interaction and manifestation of linguistic features conveying a message. In conversation, one cannot take the role of speaker or listener at all time. We have to change

our roles or turn-taking (either speaker or listener) in conversation so as to keep communication going on. In other words, the roles of speaker and listener change constantly. The person who speaks first becomes a listener as soon as the person addressed takes his or her turn in the conversation by beginning to speak. Given the fact that all of the instructions and language functions covered in the speaking tests are listed in Thai, and the preparation sheets providing questions in Thai were also distributed to the learners before the test administration, a majority of the learners had a chance to prepare answers to those questions and recited them. During the test, it was observed that the interaction between interlocutors that should be immediately occurred in a real conversation should be prioritized since the learners who answered to the questions tried to think of what they memorized and recited from the preparation sheets before taking the test, rendering a pause in conversation.   This could be taken into account by the fact that, although most of the learners passed this part of the examination, they did not understand what they were speaking, and they could not produce new English sentences by themselves in a real situation.

Another intriguing point to concern about turn-taking is that, when the speaker could not raise a question to his or her listener, the listener does not know what the meaning of questions is and when he or she has to answer the questions. How does his or her partner respond or give his or her answer? It seems that it sounds quite unnatural in communication when the speaker reads or interprets incorrectly the instructions appeared on the slips, but his or her friend can correctly give answers since he or she can remember the answers from the preparation sheets. This leads to the question how we, later at that time, control our marking scores fairly and accurately for measurement accountability.

*5.3 Communication Breaks Down*

Comprehensible inputs play a vital role in language learning, including communication.   As can be seen from the speaking tests, there are certain reasons pointing out that comprehensible inputs are major factors which contribute to communication breaks down.   First, most of the learners could not read questions to their friends accurately as most of them did not understand the instructions listed on the slips due to their limited English background knowledge and skills. As a result, a communication cannot go on during the test within the time constraint.

In addition, misunderstanding the instructions listed on the slips and mispronunciation of speakers themselves are considered other concrete factors leading to some confusion to clarify such answers and/ or to ask follow-up questions. Consider the following situation, when a speaker mispronounces the words such as *"hate"* instead of *"have"* in the question, *"What kind of food do you hate?"*, and *"leave"* instead of *"live"* in the question*, "Where did you leave?"*, the listener should ask his or her speaker to repeat the original sentence in reality, but did not. Moreover, one interesting thing that can be found in this case is that the speaker will be shy to speak out again as he or she recognizes that there might be mispronunciations during the test.

Lastly, the interlocutor himself could not answer or respond to the questions they were talking about. In this case, one possible reason that can support to this situation is that the interlocutor does not understand what the questions mean. In turn, this situation highlights the importance of listening skills as well because the speaker needs to be aware of and comprehend what he or she intends to speak out or listen to before answering or responding to the interlocutor appropriately. Therefore, these results reflect that, to teach successfully speaking skills, other skills including listening skills should be considered as they are crucial in real communication.

## 6. Pedagogical Implication

This paper aims to present English teaching in Thailand and to reveal some of insightful evidences from observations of teaching, learning, and assessing speaking competence in the Thai context. As discussed earlier, there are mismatches between teachers' rating methods and performance, and teaching approach used in the language classroom. The paper also highlights the importance of some major problems found in the English speaking tests, shedding some light onto practical suggestions to improve teaching speaking skills to Thai EFL learners.

First, in terms of teaching approaches, Thai teachers of English might consider, adopt and adapt planned eclectic approaches to teaching (Bax, 2003). If learning a foreign language is learning how to communicate with others, EFL/ESL learning and teaching should be ultimately aimed at establishing meaningful communication in the classroom, and the first requirement towards this end is an affective affirmation of the learners. In this sense, since most of the Thai teachers adopted CLT approach in teaching English, a communicative syllabus should combine all the necessary aspects to cope with the problems found in the speaking tests, reflecting a success or failure of classroom instruction. These aspects, as illustrated by Hinkel (2006), include changing perspectives on the teaching of pronunciation, pragmalinguistic skills (e.g., the emphasis on the impact of social status, social distance, and speech acts such as requests, refusals, compliments, and clarification questions.

Second, as far as the importance of grammatical structures is concerned for language instruction, particularly EFL learners, it is undeniable that learners must be conscious of the structural or grammatical features of the target language; however, this process should enable the learners to associate those features to their functional usage in producing their own language in communication.   Moreover, the learners should have the ability to use both forms and functions

properly for establishing meaningful communication. This, as a result, calls for an approach in which teachers working as controllers, facilitators, and/or helpers. These teachers might perform their functions as assessors, adopting various roles and use a wide selection of activities ranging from form-focused tasks to more informal and meaning-focused interactions whereby students are led to converge purposefully and successfully with one another (Luchini, 2004).

In addition, since Thai teachers of English are a resource person in English classroom, the role of these teachers is even more distinct, potentially influencing learners' learning. In this regard, Thai teachers of English themselves should have good foundation knowledge in English, as witnessed by Tarone (2005) demonstrating that when learning speaking skills, learners must simultaneously attend to content, morphosyntax and lexis, discourse and information structuring, and the sound system and prosody, as well as appropriate register and pragmalinguistic features. Therefore, to equip the Thai English teachers with a scholastic knowledge of linguistics for the benefits of developing learners' language skills, as suggested by Kanoksilapatham (2007), the teachers must possess both declarative and procedural knowledge, as well as need to be knowledgeable and well-rounded. The Thai teachers of English, therefore, should continuously attend training programs focusing on the teachers' own linguistic and teaching knowledge.

In terms of testing and evaluation, to assess how learners improve their speaking skills, both proficiency and achievement tests should be focused in the instruction and curriculum. To illustrate, the former indicates the general proficiency of the learners while the latter shows the mastery of the course objectives (Prapphal, 2003). In this case, it is noteworthy that, according to the limited opportunities to expose to English of Thai learners, achievement tests reflecting the real-life performance of the learners are needed. Rating criteria, test scores and performance profiles are also important indicators for teaching accountability.

Furthermore, given the fact that most Thai learners of English might not have ample opportunity to use English on a daily basis, it is crucial for teachers to create an authentic English learning environment which is accessible and available to their learners. Moreover, since the teachers adopt CLT approach in English instruction, they have to consider language assessment and course evaluation focusing on the performance in communication. Also, they should provide the learners with a number of learning facilities and teaching media appropriate to these language learners and learning context.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper addressed serious problems found in English language teaching in Thailand, specifically in teaching English speaking and English speaking tests. As far as CLT approach is concerned, serious attempts should be made to the instruction both in and outside class in order to cope with the problems we, Thai teachers, are now facing. First, it should be noted that the choice of language methodology should be appropriate and relevant to test format and evaluation, and vice versa. How can we make change or improve our learners' English performance? Teaching and learning in class should not only emphasize on speaking phrases or everyday expression, but also we have to focus on communication in the real situation, including increasing linguistic knowledge (e.g., phonetics, lexical items, pragmatic knowledge, etc.). In addition, the teachers should motivate and encourage the learners to produce new sentences or utterances by themselves in speaking English, pointing out a number of ways that can be employed to survive in real communication (e.g., asking for clarification, using gesture, etc.). However, the scenario in Thailand described above cannot be accomplished without the dedication and collaboration of educators and especially of classroom teachers who need effective language trainings and arrange appropriate provisions of the knowledge of the subject matter.

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# An Experimental Study on the Effectiveness of Multimedia

# in College English Teaching

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**Abstract**

Based on empirical research and qualitative analysis, this paper aims to explore the effectiveness of multimedia assisted methods in college English teaching. It seems and has been proved by some studies that multimedia assisted methods can effectively promote students' English learning. But the results of this study do not positively contribute to the previous hypothesis. Is multimedia a definite facilitator in college English teaching? The paper is trying to draw attention and offer insights into this problem.

**Keywords:** Multimedia assisted methods, College English teaching, Effectiveness

**1. Introduction**

It is obvious to everyone that traditional mode or singular form of classroom teaching can no longer effectively fulfill the needs of students. As a response to the call of higher quality language delivery and then in turn cultivating global competitor for the soaring economic development in china, a considerable number of teachers of College English are trying every means to find some suitable approaches to enhance their teaching quality. Thanks to the overall development of hardware, more and

more computers and multi-media equipment installed classrooms have been set up and put to use, whereby students now have access to modern equipment. Hence, a lot of direct and exciting improvements can be found here and there in English language classrooms. Needless to say, the big change is of vital importance viewed from historical perspective of English teaching. A reliable investigation (Table 1) shows as follows:

The comparisons of figures as above have strongly supported the effectiveness of teaching method reform. So we have the following hypothesis:

Multi-media assisted methods may effectively facilitate English Teaching.

As a pre-study financed by Qingdao University of Science and Technology, this study were carried out to further test the hypothesis.

**2. Method**

*2.1 Subjects*

The subjects for the study were selected, according to their English results of National College Entrance Examination and Pre-test, from first-year undergraduates of non-English majors in Qingdao University of Science and Technology where the researcher worked. Chinese was their L1, and English their L2 or foreign language. And there is no obvious difference among the two selected groups (Experimental group and Control group), we may take it for granted that the subjects roughly the same English proficiency.

*2.2 Instruments and Procedures*

In this study, the instrument used to elicit and collect information was in the form of test,. The use of language tests as tools to measure the EFL learners' literacy has been well justified in the literature. In the current study, the subjects under different teaching approaches (experimental group, multimedia methods; while control group, traditional mode) took part in the same test. Their test results were collected and analyzed to see whether the multimedia methods have positive effect on their English learning.

During the four-month experimental process, 112 subjects from two classes were taught English by the same teacher with the same textbook *New Horizon College English*. In the experimental group, the researcher made full use of well-made multimedia courseware which involves a combination of a large range of communication elements – text, sound, graphics, pictures, photographs, animation and video clips. Each media element has its own particular advantage in conveying particular kinds of messages and evoking particular kinds of learner responses. While in the control group,

the lessons were given in the traditional classroom, mainly includes teaching materials (textbooks, text-related cards, pictures etc.), chalk plus talk, and sometimes taping-recorder.

Both groups were required to take turns to give a three-minute oral presentation before class and the subjects in the experimental group had to use the PowerPoint format. To prepare for the presentation, the subjects of both groups tried every means possible to accumulate, select and analyze the best information on their own. The PowerPoint files made by subjects in the experimental group were not only filled with many beautiful photos, paintings, but also with music and sometimes even videos, which made the presentation impressive, expressive and more enjoyable.

At the end of the experimental term, with a purpose of comprehensive test of the language proficiency of the subjects, both groups were asked to take part in the same test – the final examination which included writing, speed reading, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, cloze and translation. After the test, the test papers were carefully collected by the researcher.

*2.3 Data Analysis*

*2.3.1 Data Preparation*

In the quantitative study, a few steps were followed to prepare the data for statistical analysis. The raw data in the study was first inspected and as expected, some missing scores were found for the tests. However, to determine whether these scores should be treated as "missing" or "wrong", the researcher established the following procedures. First, if a subject made a reasonable attempt to answer the questions in the test, the questions left unanswered were treated as wrong and scored zero. However, if a subject left an entire test paper blank or if more than half of the questions were unanswered, the data were regarded as missing, and the subject was dropped from the statistics. In accordance with these conditions, the final number, which was of statistical value, of subjects in experimental group was 55, and the control group was 57.

*2.3.2 Scoring of the Tests*

In the data analysis, all the object answers sheets were marked by the computer, and in order to get more convincible and persuasive results, the subject answers (writing and translation) were objectively marked by three different teachers rather than the researcher himself and the mean of the three scores were the final scores for the subject parts.

And the raw scores were carefully typed into the SPSS data table in order to gain the desired data.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results have been fed into SPSS (12.0) and analyzed using independent sample T-test analysis.

Table 2 shows that in Test 1, Group 1 and Group 2 are quite similar in the means (Group 1 is 69.33, while Group 2 is 70.92), this means both groups have nearly the same English proficiency, and though experimental group is a little lower, it ($P > 0.05$) has no significance at all. Therefore, the results of the test proves that, though under different teaching approach, the two groups does not show much difference, and the two different methods does not affect the scores of the subjects. Or in another way, the multimedia approach did not show its advantages over the traditional method, which is contradicted to the hypothesis and the established belief.

Is it a failed experimental study? What is the problem? Though there are a number of other factors such as preparation for the examination, health state while taking examination, gender difference and so on, that play important roles in the examination, the test results really means something, and it aroused a question that whether the multimedia assisted method a definite facilitator in English teaching, which deserves more consideration and further reflection.

## 4. Further Discussion

According to the theory of Constructivism, knowledge is not taught but is learned by the learner himself through constructing new knowledge on the bases of old knowledge, under a certain setting, with the help of others, such as teachers or study partners, utilizing certain study resources. So the student should be the center of teaching and "student-centered methodology" should be used. That is to say, the student is the center of teaching and the teacher works as organizer, facilitator and motivator, utilizing setting, cooperation and dialogue to motivate the student's interests, activity and creativity. Teachers should meet the needs of students. From this point of view, multi-media assisted approach can help students learn in this way.

It cannot be denied that multimedia assisted approach can make English learning more interesting, and to some extent, change the situation of *having to learn* into *willing to learn*. Multimedia courseware combines sound, pictures, texts together and it offers a vivid, direct study environment. It has different kinds of forms, exercises, and activities. It can arouse students' interest.

It can facilitate English teaching and learning and make it more efficient. Well-designed courseware can provide students with a lot of useful information, such as word study, useful expressions, language structures, sentence explanations, cultural background, organization of the text, Chinese translation of the text and exercises. Just click the mouse and students can present the visual information the students needed easily and efficiently, saving a lot of time

otherwise used in lecturing and blackboard writing. Teachers can do more important things in class: to design some activities to see whether students have really grasped the knowledge they should learn, to explain difficult parts, to practice spoken English by giving them some topics to discuss or by doing other things, such as, debate and role-playing. In this way, students can really grasp and use the language, because the final goal of language teaching is to use it freely.

But the test results prompt us to reflect the disadvantages of multimedia assisted approach in college English teaching. Long hours of watching courseware screen which is filled with text, sound, graphics, pictures, photographs, animation and moving video is harmful to the eyes, and it is easy for students to become tired after long periods of watching and sitting. What's more, in the face of so much information, some students will feel lost and not know what to choose.

Meanwhile, the new method cannot meet all the expectations. With the help of various resources that internet offers, teachers find things greatly attract them and in turn unavoidably organize teaching materials according to their own interest, while think a little less of making study an evolutionary and systematic process for students. Students are still relatively passive in the seemingly new learning environment. Teachers are the lords of all the sources. Students do what they are told to. They take down notes from the screen, try hard to memorize them and follow through to do simulated practice. Frustrations thus appear in the classroom. Students become stenographers. Teachers can hardly make students listen to their explanations or appreciate insights into matters, not to mention discussions between them. When lights are turned off the dark classroom might become the best napping place. It seems that the so-called exciting advanced technology — multi-media assisted teaching method is to some extent only a practical electronic blackboard.

The alleged four elements of education are teachers, students, teaching materials and multi-media facilities. They are interconnected and interacted efficiently during the course of teaching. Teachers mechanically provide input, cue up and switch on videos and tapes, sometimes forgetting whom they are teaching and their real aims to teach. Just as easy to tune-out modern method so teachers can fail to do their best they see themselves as technicians. Students become lonely learners on the planet of high-tech.

## 5. Conclusion

Aware of all these problems mentioned above, we might as well conclude that current multi-media assisted teaching method is not facilitating a two-way communication atmosphere, student-oriented classroom, or cultivating students' independent learning ability.

So, to solve these problems, Teachers' role should be dramatically altered and encourage the teachers to update their concept of multi-media, base their teaching planning on theory of constnictivism, tailor to different students' need for language learning. What they should do is to offer visual audio input, that is, they organize materials that are used to help in their lesson preparation, providing texts, sound, digital video, grammar or vocabulary exercises that can be used in class; students should do individual exploring and presentation, the World Wide Web for example can be used by learners as research materials for classroom presentations or as sources for materials and information for project work, as well as students' group work. In addition, It's time for ESL teachers and software experts to work out practical and advanced English teaching courseware, which is an integration of virtual real situation, collaboration, conversation and meaning construction, etc.

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Table 1. The Comparison of Memory through Different Ways

|  | Verbally transmitted information | Silently memorized information | Audio-visually transmitted information |
|---|---|---|---|
| Memory after 3 hours | 60% | 70% | 90% |
| Memory after 3 days | 15% | 40% | 75% |

Table 2. Means Comparison for Test 1

|  | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | t | Sig.(2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Experimental Group (1) | 55 | 69.33 | 8.6 |  |  |
| Control Group (2) | 57 | 70.92 | 9.4 | .024 | .981 |

# Cultural and Social Interpretation of Chinese Addressing Strategies

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of Chinese cultural factors on the addressing terms, together with the history of their use, the social dynamics involved in their use. Through the examination of exact terms, the author demonstrates to the reader, the deeply rooted cultural factors behind it and different ways that these terms can be used, depending upon the different situations. This kind of cultural and social interpretation is supposed to help communicators     better understand addressing terms in different situations.

**Keywords:** Address terms, Chinese culture, Intercultural communication, Sociolinguistics, Solidarity

## 1. Introduction

*1.1Background theories*

1.1.1Culture and language

Certain quantities of papers and articles concerning culture and language have come out in the past showing that the relation between language and culture is important: history, worldview, belief, values, religions, and social organization may all be reflected through different languages and linguistic varieties in a culture. The aspects of culture, which are most significant for the understanding of language and which have been shown to be major factors in communication, plays a vital part in the forms of discourse. Culture, therefore, is the 'know-how' that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living; only for a few does it require a knowledge of some, or much, music, literature, and the arts. In the different cultural contexts, language variation seems unavoidable. Consider the addressing systems vary in different societies.

1.1.2. Politeness system (social factors)

We could describe such general and persistent regularities in face relationships as politeness systems. Both speakers in the system would use a certain fairly regular set of face strategies in speaking to each other. There are three main factors involved which bring such a politeness (or face) system into being: Power, distance, and the weight of the imposition.

In discussions of face or politeness systems, the first factor, "power", refers to the vertical disparity between the participants in a hierarchical structure. Distance (+D, -D) between two participants could not be confused with the power difference between them. Distance can be seen most easily in egalitarian relationships (-P). The third factor that will influence face strategies is the weight of the imposition (+W, -W). Even if two participants in a speech event have very fixed relationship between them, the face strategies they will use will vary depending on how important the topic of discussion is for them.

Three main types of politeness system can be observed in many different contexts. These are based primarily on whether there is a power difference (+P or -P) and on the distance between participants (+D or-D). We have called them the deference politeness system, the solidarity politeness system, and the hierarchical politeness system.

1.1.3. Chinese tradition (cultural factors)

Chinese society is the extension of the clan, thus possessing strong characteristics of family flavour, especially in the kinship addressing terms. Chinese value traditions, which are different from the western societies, causing many addressing system having Chinese characteristics. For example, "Face" is synthesize of Chinese traditional culture, traditional concept of value and features of personality, and it is a hidden rule of Chinese human society, because "face" represents one's reputation in the society, and the reputation gained by achievements and praises during his life journey, and he should obtain such reputation under certain circumstances.  Furthermore, occasionally, long- term feudal hierarchical structure still influences Chinese society deeply. At the same time, the increasingly ongoing intercultural communication exerts certain impacts on Chinese addressing system.

*1.2. Addressing terms and culture*

Addressing terms, the most direct and frequent linguistic occurrence in the daily life, to some extent, are the signals and reflections of the social culture, from which we can clearly see the hidden cultural factors. We will see that certain

linguistic shows a speaker makes indicate the social relationship that the speaker perceives to exist between them. Furthermore, we can see the different aspects of Chinese culture. Addressing terms is the systematic and variable social phenomenon, thus making it a significant social linguistic variable. From the perspective of Sociolinguistics, address behaviour contains rich social and cultural connotations and may be the symbols of social power and solidarity. I will demonstrate in the following section the actual use of Chinese address terms in various interpersonal relations, the hidden culture factors and the condition(s) for their occurrence in Chinese.

## 2. Interpretation of addressing terms

### 2.1. Addressing others by name

The Chinese addressing system really mirrors the uniqueness of Chinese culture. Chinese value their own good reputations the most, which is "ming sheng"in Chinese characters. Such value system makes Chinese cherish their names very much. And how to be addressed by others is comparatively significant. Therefore, Chinese have a very complicated addressing system. In the ancient time, there used to be a complex naming system. Besides the family name and given name, people used to have hao or bie hao (nickname). So people could be addressed by their full name or family name + nickname to show different levels of intimacy. For example, Confucius' Chinese name was Kŏng Qiū, where Kŏng was his family name and Qiū was his personal name. In addition he had a zì, which was Zhòngní, the name by which he is usually called in the Confucian canon. (The word zì means "written symbol," but in this special usage some Sinologists translate it "style.") He can be addressed in different ways depending on how the others are related to him, in a relationship of solidarity or a relationship of power.

At present, Most Chinese today have only a surname (xing) and a given name (míngzi), plus perhaps a nickname (chuohao) or two. Occasionally members of the intelligentsia use a literary sobriquet (hao), continuing this old custom. How people address others shows the power between the participants. The asymmetric use of title, last name, and first name (TLN/FN) indicated inequality in power, that mutual TLN indicated inequality and unfamiliarity, and that mutual FN indicated equality and familiarity. The switch from mutual TLN to FN is usually initiated by the more powerful member of the relationship. When addressing others, politeness strategy should be taken into consideration. For instance, Mr. Wang can be addressed Wang ju zhang by his staff, Wang Weiguo by his intimate friends, Wang Weiguo Tong zhi in some conferences and Guozi(nick name) by his best friends. Occasionally, using a nickname or pet name shows even greater intimacy. At present, there is a tendency in china to use more and more address terms of solidarity instead of the terms with power due to the changing of the society. It shows that Chinese society is approaching social patterns of solidarity.

### 2.2. Addressing family members (kinship)

Chinese has much complicated kinship addressing terms, which is very descriptive than many other languages.

Among this rich kinship system, Chinese have too many Tang and Biao relatives, which is distinct from other societies. E.g. Tang xiong di jie mei ,Biao xiong di jie mei.Here, what are Tang and Biao's connotations? Chinese has a long tradition of the clan society, which characterized the extended families patterns. It is not uncommon to see several generations living under the same roof in china. In the old times, the clan meetings usually were hold in the hall (Tang).So the political center of the family, Tang, naturally became the symbol of a clan. That's why the siblings of the same clan names are called Tang relatives. Biao means alien in Chinese, that is to say , not belonging to this clan. That is why the cousins on mother's side are addressed Biao xiong di jie mei.Likewise, parents of mother are addressed Wai grandparents. "Biao"and"Wai"are well embodied the thoughts of differentia between in clans and out clans(Nei wai you bie) in the   clan society. Besides, The differentia of Tang xiong di jie mei and Biao xiong di jie mei indicates the traditional men-centered and women-humbled concept. The kinship system itself is generation-and age-oriented with terms for both the paternal and maternal sides. It also gives more weight to males than females.

Another characteristics of kinship terms is that it emphasizes the orders of age very much(Zhang you you xu).Children are ordered, for example as "Sibling two","Sibling three". Chinese clan society was centered on the father to son ties. Every kinship terms are marked with the inside and outside color due to the sex factors. Chinese think "Zhang zhe wei zun","Zhang you you xu",that is why in Chinese family kinship addressing terms ,we have characters Xiong di jie mei respectively to refer to elder or younger sisters and elder or younger brother in English.

Something interesting I want to mention here is the addressing of one's spouse. More than one decade years ago, Chinese used to address their spouse as "Airen",which is translated literally into English as "lover". That is because new Chinese government wanted to erase the inequality between the husbands and wives in the old china. However, this made the Westerners confused. As we can see, there are some changes now because of the influence of the foreign culture. Between young couples, they get used to addressing their spouse with "Xian sheng" or "Tai tai", or  "Lao gong" and "Lao po" in a casual way. The change of the titles may gradually shape the more and more equal relationship between husband and wife.

With the development of the society and the improvement of the women's social position, Chinese kinship system lost

some feudal clan flavor. People regard their Tang relatives the same as their Biao relatives. Grandparents show the same affection to their grandchild, no matter this grandchild is their daughter's or their son's. The frequent usage of the characters of Biao and Tang will decrease in the next several decades for the one child policy which was adopted in the 1970s.

*2.3. Social address*

As to the social address system, Chinese have quite different system from the western societies. The clan society extends the orders to the societies, forming the vertical hierarchical system. For thousands of years, Chinese have been paid much attention to the hierarchical order (Zhang you you xu, Zhun bei you xu) . In today's China, people, therefore, still address those who has an official rank or professional titles with prestige, in the way of "family name + title", This way of addressing shows people's respect for the official ranks and power, which are regarded by most Chinese as symbols of success and acknowledgement of one's competence and luck. For instance, "Li Shuji" (secretary of the CCP), "Wang Jingli" (Manager Wang), "Chen Laoshi"(Teacher Chen) and "Wu Yuanzhang" (Dean Wu), etc not only in working environment but in daily life. We can noticed that one title with power is Laoshi at present. Generally speaking, teachers are supposed to have power over the students. That's why the title of Laoshi represent power. At the same time Laoshi is the symbol of culture. This widely used title, therefore, represent society's psychological expectations for power and knowledge.

The asymmetric use of names and address terms is often a clear indictor of a power differential. Choosing the right terms of address to use in a hierarchical organization may not always be easy, for instance, in the military. Chinese public servants world is also hierarchically organized, though generally less rigidly than the military. One study showed that public servants have a very good idea of how they should address others and be addressed by them. At the presence of the superiors, inferiors should address the superiors their official rank, consider, Zhang Xiaozhang(President Zhang), and will omit the fu (vice) even if the superior is the vice one. Recently, What is apparent is that, in such a hierarchical structure, people seek to maximize the distance to show the intimacy, by addressing the less formal style, like Li Ting(Li Tingzhang), Zhang chu(Zhang chuzhang), Guo dui(Guo Duizhang).

As to the addressing terms to the strangers, Chinese actually employ what we regard as kinship terms for use. Chinese make extensive use of kinship terms as forms of address, e.g. shushu (uncle),a'yi(aunt), Zhang yeye(Grandpa Zhang).The extension of kinship terms to non-kin persons in Chinese communities, socializing the young into respect for their elders and care for their young. Wu says, "extending the family relationships to outsiders thus fulfills the goal of 'one family under the sky' (tianxia yijia)" (1989). Feudal dynasties, which were based on the agricultural economy, ruled china so long that its value of blood ties affects Chinese society to great extent. The extensive use of kinship is substantially the power effect of clan in the society. On the other hand, Social address reflects the solidarity aspects of the Chinese culture as well. The harmony-oriented interpersonal relationship is highly valued as well in this collectivism society. The application of kinship terms to the society will make the whole society a big family under the sky, thus forging the intimate and harmonious climate in the society.

The other marked changes of kinship-oriented terms in the society are the addressing to the women. Addressing women is more and more likely to be based on the direct links with women rather than on the indirect links with men. Jie (Sister) is much more adopted nowadays than the previous dasao (Sister-in-law), the latter indicating that the woman is attached to certain man. The establishment and prevailing of both titles of a'yi (Aunt) and jie (Sister) is based on the female position, which represents the increase of self-consciousness and the equality between the two genders. Such addresses make people feeling intimate and polite. The change is also the outcome of solidarity factors affecting the communication.

There is also widespread use of lao and xiao in conjunction with last names as polite forms not only between intimates but also to mark social distinctions between non-intimates. The addressing between acquaintances and colleagues are simple. The pattern "Xiao", "Lao" and "Da" + family name are often used according to their ages.

## 3. Politeness strategy

There are three main factors involved which bring such a politeness (or face) system into being: Power, distance, and the weight of the imposition. Chinese people are carefully choosing the appropriate terms to address others and selves to give face (politeness) to others.

About a century ago, Arthur Henderson Smith, a preacher from America, regarded "loving mianzi" as the major characteristic of Chinese in his book Chinese Characteristics. And nowadays, some western scholars and businessmen still believe that the understanding of "mian zi" is a key to understanding Chinese people. Actually, "mianzi" can be easily translated into "face" in English, it is a product of the Chinese tradition, and in ancient times, Chinese consider "face" as a kind of honour, for example, the sons of a family must work hard, and be crowned with success in the end, that will bring great honour to their family, and the whole family will gain "face" in the neighbourhood.

People used to address themselves in a humble way by using such words as "Zai xiao","Bi ren","Bu cai" ; while

addressing others, such honorific titles as "××gong","××lao","××jun" were employed If the person was an official in the court, he used to be addressed in way of his family name + official post. For example , Du Fu, one of the greatest poet in Tang dynasty, was addressed as Du Gongbu (gongbu,ministry councillor ).Chinese highly advocate modesty and self-humbled and others-respected. Such politeness is deeply rooted in the Confucian Li system, which emphasize on belittling self and respecting others, and the golden means.

The complexity of the old addressing system reveals the profoundness and order of ancient society. It is said that the Chinese way of addressing reflects one's class, social state and reputation. There are different rules in addressing different groups of people, which should be obeyed by any participant in the community. By doing so, the ritual and courtesy are advocated and emphasised. The addressing system has been followed for above one thousand year.

Many other factors affect the way of addressing. Such factors might be the educational background, the social state, the age, the situation and so on. For instance, in addressing one's wife, there are many choices such as "Fu ren", "Taitai","Laopo","Jia li de",or in some dialects in the north China "waer ta niang","an na kou zi". However, in English one word "wife" will do.

A number of further complications in naming and addressing, having to do with the complicated social arrangements found in Chinese life. A person's name varies with circumstances, for each person has a number of names with he or she can use, in addressing another, the choice of name which you use for the other depends both on your knowledge of exactly who the other is and on the circumstances of the meeting.

## 4. Development of addressing terms

A whole society, which is undergoing social change, is also likely to show certain indications of such change if the language in use in that society has a complex system of address. One such society is modern China. Addressing terms will keep changing incessantly with the development of society.

Let us take the tongzhi as the example. The communist Party of China has promoted the use of tongzhi (comrade) to replace titles for owners and employers, proprietor and mister. The party wants to put everyone on an equal footing through encouraging the use of an address form that implies no social or economic differences and unites all politically. With the introduction of the victory of Russian Revolution in the early 1900's, "comrade" has been the most popular addressing for Chinese till the late 1980's. It has been adapted to different situations and different relationships. However, now, the address of "comrade" seems out-of-date, and seems to have been abandoned. And interestingly, it has some added meaning of gay in big cities like shanghai, Hong Kong district.

Another example is xiaojie. Taken as a whole, changes in address modes in today's China are unique and drastic. Xiaojie has lost its previous derogatory connotations, especially among young people.   In 2005, a survey by a media shows that 40% of women refused to be addressed by xiaojie for its special negative connotation is the present. The zigzag fate of xiaojie very well reflect the changing characteristics of language, embodied the social use of the language with Its disappearing after the foundation of new china, reappearing and flouring after the reform and opening policy, applied in certain field, and hesitantly accepted by the present women afterwards. As a polite term in the communication, we can also see that xiao jie is still on the top terms in women's heart. It is predicted that ,xiaojie , with its strong practical and current flavor will still be the dominant addressing terms than the traditional dajie , meizi , yatou , guniang.

## 5. Conclusion

All in all, if we look at what is involved in addressing another, it seems that a variety of social factors usually governs our choice of terms: the particular occasion; the social status or rank of the other; sex; age/family relationship; occupational hierarchy; transactional statues. Address terms are the symbol of the social power and solidarity. Choosing the right terms of address to use in a hierarchical organization may not always be easy. We can see some of the possible dangers in cross-culture communication when different relationships are expressed through twat appear, superficially at least, to the same address system. Apart from that, Chinese address system is also affected by the traditional, hierarchical and vertical structured clan society with feudalistic characteristics. In china, addressing terms seems so complicated and confused; only by knowing its hidden cultural and social connotations can we do better in the communications.

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# ESP at the Tertiary Level: Current Situation, Application and Expectation

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**Abstract**

English for Specific Purposes is an obligatory subject for the first two levels at the Sudanese Universities. It is taught as a university requirement. Accordingly, the students obsess is how to pass the examination not achieve any development in the language field. Even the teachers concentrate on the content rather than the skills, which the students ought to gain.

This paper addresses the issue of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It defines ESP with brief glimpse of its history and it attempts to highlight the line of demarcation of ESP and AEP. Moreover, it will endeavor the objectives of core course of ESP at the tertiary level in Sudanese Universities.

Furthermore, how we should mobilize all the efforts to overcome the difficulties to promote the students competency in English language in their very field of specialization. As technology has created change in all aspects of society, it is also changing our expectations of what students must learn in order to function effectively.

We should exploit the modern technologies effectively to radically change from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach in teaching ESP. Consequently, the availability of computer and its utilization in different fields of specialization will be very facilitative and motivating for at least the contemporary generation.

**Keywords:** English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (AEP), Sudanese Universities

## Introduction

English for Specific Purposes, so far, is probing its way in our Sudanese universities. It is taught as a university requirement. Unfortunately, our students are disappointed when they graduate confronting the real situation in the workplace to use their ESP background. Most of the students feel they discontent with the syllabus which had been taught, because it doesn't meet their needs. Furthermore, the EFL teachers concentrate on teaching general English rather than ESP. This situation evokes the question whether we teach English for Academic purposes or English for Specific Purposes at the tertiary level. Whatsoever the case ESP or EAP is an obligatory subject for the first two levels at the Sudanese Universities. Accordingly, we should investigate the topic to characterize the term first, and then discuss the relevant issues. We have to find out what kind of language acquisition is actually required by the learner.

According to my personal experience with many universities, we follow a traditional approach of teaching and examination. As matter of fact, the students' obsession is how to pass the examination rather than to achieve any development in the language field; on the other hand, the teachers themselves concentrate on the content rather than the language skills, which the students have to gain. Optimistically, this situation is gradually changing and the teachers are getting aware of need analysis in designing their material to meet the goals of his learners.

This article addresses the issue of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It defines ESP with attentively attempts to highlight the line of demarcation of ESP and EAP. Moreover, it will endeavor the objectives of the core course of ESP at the tertiary level. Furthermore, how we should mobilize all the efforts to overcome the difficulties to promote the students communicative competency in English language in their very field of their specialization.

## The Current Situation of ESP

There is an obvious confusion between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and (EAP)    English for Academic Purposes. For this reason we should attempt to distinguish the line of demarcation between the terms.

What is EAP?

Let us first attempt to define English for Academic Purposes to be acquainted with the topic. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a kind of courses designed to help the overseas students to cope with their intended college courses; accordingly, such students of EAP must have some background in English language. The classes which are given for

EAP students focus on the four skills as well as grammar using everyday English, so as to be more effective in their everyday lives. Orr (1998) sates that:

"English for General Purposes (EGP) is essentially the English language education in junior and senior high schools. Students are introduced to the sounds and symbols of English, as well as to the lexical/grammatical/rhetorical elements that compose spoken and written discourse … University instruction that introduces students to common features of academic discourse in the sciences or humanities, frequently called English for Academic Purposes (EAP), is equally ESP."

Consequently, it can be said that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for General Purposes (EGP) are one. In fact, what is taught in the general education or private institutions is typically English for general purposes and to some extent what is taught now in our universities under the term ESP is typical general English.

**What is ESP?**

English for Specific Purposes or English for Special Purposes (ESP) has developed gradually to be an important area of interest for all who are concerned with the activities of the discipline it serves. There are many fields of interest with various activities which require special linguistic competency such as technical English, scientific English, medical English, English for business, English for political affairs, and English for tourism. Wright (1992) defines the concept of English for Specific Purposes, "ESP is, basically, language learning which has its focus on all aspects of language pertaining to a particular field of human activity, while taking into account the time constraints imposed by learners". Orr (1998) goes further on clarifying the line of demarcation between ESP and EAP stating that:

"English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is research and instruction that builds on EGP and is designed to prepare students or working adults for the English used in specific disciplines, vocations, or professions to accomplish specific purposes"

It is obvious that ESP context must be preceded by a sizeable background of general English. As it has been argued, ESP is associated with mature learners by and large, because it has a strong relationship with specialization in different fields of concern.

Although ESP is a controversial issue, consequently, there is much misinterpretation concerning the exact definition of ESP. Moreover there is a hot debate whether or not English for Academic Purposes (EAP) could be considered part of ESP in general. Some scholars described ESP as simply being the teaching of English for any purpose that could be specified.

Mackay and Mountford (1978: 2) defined ESP as the teaching of English for a "clearly utilitarian purpose". The purpose they refer to is defined by the needs of the learners, which could be academic, occupational, or scientific. These needs in turn determine the content of the ESP curriculum to be taught and learned. Mackay and Mountford also defined ESP and the "special language" that takes place in specific settings by certain participants. They claimed that those participants are usually matures. They focused on adults because adults are usually "highly conscious" of the reasons to achieve English proficiency in the very field of their specialization. Inevitably, adults make use of the specialized language in authentic situations, because the activities of their specialization compelled to use the appropriate ESP.

Fortunately, Dudley – Evans, Coeditor of the ESP Journal did a good job by defining ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics.

Definition of ESP (Dudley-Evans, 1998):

2.3.1. Absolute Characteristics

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners

2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves

3. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

2.3.2. Variable Characteristics

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines

2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English

3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level

4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students

5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems

Apparently, Dudley-Evans' benefitted from Strevens' (1988) definition in his characterizations for the term. However, he has improved ESP significantly by including more variable characteristics "in contrast with 'General English'" (Johns et al., 1991: 298). The division of ESP into total and variable distinctiveness and makes the matter more clear. However, the distinction between General English and ESP is very thin, but it is tangible as Hutchinson et.al. (1987:53) claims, "in theory nothing, in practical a great deal."

Most of ESP definitions distinguish three themes: the nature of language to be taught and used, the learners, and the settings in which the other two would occur. These three aspects of ESP are very much connected together. ESP is the teaching of specific English (specialized discourse) to learners (adults), who will use it, in a particular setting (business, engineering, medical field, science, etc.) in order to realize a practical purpose.

Bearing in mind all the definitions mentioned, we admit that ESP is broader than what we apparently bounded to, in our universities. Hence, ESP may be considered as an 'approach' to teaching, or what Dudley-Evans describes as an 'attitude of mind'. The likewise (Hutchinson et al. 1987:19) state that, "ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning".

Accordingly, ESP teachers should be aware for the matter and should not concentrate on teaching general English, but they have to satisfy their students' needs for the language in the different fields of specialization in order to use the language linguistically correct verbally or on paper.

Application of ESP

ESP is considered as a goal directed kind of language; therefore, the students are not learning the English language for its own sake, but because there is a need for its exploitation in the workplace and they are enforced by a certain motivation. ESP is considered as a major field of EFL teaching at present. It begins to emerge from the EFL field since the 1960s. EFL teachers nowadays are more aware of the role of ESP in the different modern fields of specialization.

As a matter of fact, ESP development is obvious in the growing number of universities offering an MA in ESP and in the number of ESP courses offered in Great Britain and America. That indicates ESP is determined by specific learning needs of the language learner. Therefore the teacher's role should not be restricted to mere teaching, but should extend to be a course designer, researcher, evaluators, and an active participator in all of aspects of the teaching/learning process.

Needs analysis

EFL teachers have to be aware of the need analyses importance in the field of ESP. Needs analysis helps us to collect information about our students' learning needs and wants to help us draw the objectives of the targeted core courses and determined the appropriate content. It is very important to start your needs analysis for the targeted group of students before you determine the exact content, which you are going to subscribe them. Consequently, needs analysis has been given a significant consideration in making a particular course serve a particular group's interests (Graves K., 1996; Harrison R., 1996; Hutchison T. & A. Waters, 1987; Vorobieva N., 1996).

## Course Design

You have to ask whether your students will use English to pass the exam as a university requirement or in workforce after graduation. Absolutely, in this case our intention is to prepare learners for the future not for passing exams, because we rely on the results of the need analysis, which we have to execute before designing the ESP course. ESP needs analysis positions a solid foundation for a stable ESP syllabus. Since needs analysis have been run for the targeted group to collect data about their learning needs then the process of core courses designation will take place. Designing a course for any ESP system need a considerable amount of general English along with an integrated functional terminological language matted in the targeted ESP course which is based on the needs analysis. Moreover, the objective of the course must be authentic to meet the needs of students to grantee motivation and better achievement.

On the area under discussion of an ESP course for Greek student, Xenodohidis, (2002) confirms that: "the goals should be realistic; otherwise the students would be de-motivated." Concerning, another ESP course for employees at the American University of Beirut, Shaaban (2005) explains that the core course development and its content focus on a common core for the learners from various workplaces. This content contains basic social English communication, following directions, giving instructions, along with specialized terminologies and expressions. Developing a course for health science, Gatehouse (2001) also integrates General English language content and acquisition skills for language.

Referring to the mentioned cases of ESP, it can be concluded that General English language content, grammar, functions and skills acquisition are the dominant aspects in any core course plan, while terminologies and specific functions of a particular content are integrated in the course to meet the learners' specific needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) compare ESP to the leaves and branches of a tree to a language tree. Without any roots to absorb water, leaves or branches would not grow up; so do the leaves and branches ESP language will not flourish, if they lack the essential

language support such as general English grammar, lexis and functions. Gilmour and Marshal (1993) argue that the ESP learners' difficulties are not attributed to the lack of technical terminology but mostly due to the shortage of general English vocabulary. These essential items must be matted in the prescribed course for the ESP learners with relevancy to the field of specialization. Moreover, in designing any ESP course, attention should be paid to the four learning styles, using a range of combinations of knowledge, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Different experiential elements should be used in the classroom, such as sound, music, visuals, movement, experience, and even talking.

## Prospect of ESP

### The Future

Nowadays English is the dominant language of communication worldwide, even among non-native speakers. This situation has a great influence on the type of ESP syllabus we provide and the type of research required to be emphasized. Although, ESP in Sudanese universities is in its infancy, it has a promising future. No doubt, EFL teachers who teach the ESP courses are more aware of the new progress of the theory and methodology in the field of ESP and its role in the community it serves. This progress in theory and methodology covered three aspects of ESP: genre analysis, corpus analysis and systemic functional linguistics. EFL teachers who teach ESP courses have to distinguish between ESP and EAP in order to grantee its steady progress of areas of concern. There should be much more researches in this vital field to explore the needs and draw clear objectives of each discipline. ESP teachers have to shoulder the responsibility of assessing the needs of their students, setting the learning objectives, organizing the courses, creating a vivid learning environment in the classroom, evaluating his students' development and assuring the quality continuously.

Nowadays, there is an immense breakthrough of the modern information and communication technologies (ICT). Computer is the corner stone of these technologies; via this smart machine we listen, speak, read, write and even communicate at distance. Therefore, it is applicable to invest these facilities in the teaching and learning process. Now, we can change our traditional classes to more modern styles of instructing either utilizing the multimedia or even online learning via the web. ESP materials or classes can be approachable in a very apt techniques to meet the different needs and the advance method of instructional designing does let the learner feels the loneliness or remoteness. Open and distance learning would be a very suitable mode instruction for ESP adult learners in the future.

## Recommendations and Suggestions

Teachers should concentrate on the learner's interaction (student-centered) rather than lecturing and overwhelming the course with exhaustive list of words and boring grammar exercises. Meaningful interaction with others speakers in the target language enhances the opportunity for competency. Therefore, we have to create opportunities for the learners to create effective communication skills in the classroom.

Many researchers have revealed that especially adult learners differ very much in the ways they learn a foreign language. Therefore EFL teachers should be aware of r learning styles of their students. Moreover, teachers should employ a variety of assessment techniques, focusing on the development of "whole brain" capacity and each of the different learning styles.

We have large ESP classes full of learners with different learning strategies and learning styles. Consequently, we have to make use of modern technologies in our classes or otherwise the traditional audio visual aids to meet our learners' needs and to motivate them. In addition, there should be a variety of activities such as presentation, problem solving, role-play, practical hand-on activities field visits and interviews with experts using the target language exclusively.

We should make use of the worldwide web for different activities to expose ESP learners to different experiences and different activities with various techniques.

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