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Table of Contents:

Foreword

Welcome to the first issue of 2007. Again we present papers from a variety of international sources on current themes such as competence in international English, intercultural collaboration and task-based learning. The *Asian EFL Journal* is also interested in exploring different approaches to academic writing including article writing styles and this issue again presents some different formats alongside the more familiar format of the research article. We also hope that many of these research papers not only raise problems but also suggest solutions to them that can be adapted and applied by readers in their own local contexts.

In the first contribution, "Academic Discussion Tasks: A Study of EFL Students' Perspectives", Eunhee Han, a Ph.D. candidate in TESOL at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, provides us with an important insight into the challenges facing EFL students studying in American universities. Han focuses on "oral/aural skill for class participation." As "one of the crucial obstacles for EFL students' academic success", Han also suggests how this problem can be solved. Combining personal experience with research, this paper provides very useful advice for all involved.

In "Discourse Markers in Academic Lectures", Eslami and Rasekh also attempt to shed light on another practical issue from the world of EAP, providing us with an interesting discussion of the processes underlying academic performance in English. This piece provides clear conclusions about the need to supply discourse markers in academic lectures and underlines the importance of such a finding not only for lecturers, but also for materials designers, teachers and teacher trainers. Eslami and Rasekh point out that this is an area that is relatively easily taught and well worth teaching as it may have an immediate effect on comprehension.

Another theme that the *Asian EFL Journal* supports as actively as possible is intercultural collaboration. In “Collaborating Together: Linked Intercultural Learning Activities for Undergraduate Japanese and American Students”, Linda Heuser from the USA takes up the theme of intercultural learning and learning communities, proposing a set of learning activities designed “as a way to increase students’ intercultural competence and language fluency”. Her task-based/project-based assignments involved equal collaboration between Japanese and American students.

On a related topic, Leila B. Iyldyz, from Kazakhstan responds to our request for papers on the concept of competence in EIL – an ongoing theme very central to the work of the *Asian EFL Journal* and one that will be discussed in some detail at our upcoming global conference in May. In “Rethinking Validity of the L2 Proficiency Concept: Lessons for EIL” , Leila considers the concept of “proficiency” pointing out that “the concept seems to be understood and be a useful reference point in the discourse of L2 professionals until it is questioned and further explored.” As all of us discover when working in detail on this theme, “defining “proficiency” is a more complex topic than is generally assumed.” Iyldyz provides us with a useful background discussion highlighting some aspects useful for careful consideration when constructing the “EIL competence” framework.

Also raising the issue of "proficiency" but from a different angle, in “A survey on the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students”, Ataollah Maleki and Ebrahim Zangani explore language proficiency in relation to overall academic achievement. They conclude that, “English language proficiency is a good indicator and predictor of academic achievement for those students who are majoring in English (the EFL area), at least in the Iranian context.”

The next group of papers highlights the usefulness of being sensitive to the students' perspective. In “Language Learning Style Preferences: A Students Case Study of Shiraz EFL Institutes”, Abdolmehdi Riazi and Mohammad Javad Riasati, investigate the language learning style preferences of EFL learners, and the degree to which teachers are aware of them. Their results indicate areas that could be targeted for closer cooperation between teachers and students. For example, “students like to interact with each other and be actively

engaged in classroom debates". Preferences are linked to motivation. In "Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English at the Tertiary Level", Meihua Liu takes up the theme of motivation in relation to proficiency discovering that "students' attitudes and motivation were positively correlated with their English proficiency". Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh's study, "A Survey of the Students and Interns' EFL Writing Problems in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences", was set up to determine whether language skills or writing skills were the major problem areas faced by senior medical students and interns. They concluded that medical students have problem both in language and writing skills, but the main problems were in process/genre writing skills.

Lixia Wang from China also considers the process of academic writing, from a systemic linguistics point of view, in "Theme and Rheme in the Thematic Organization of Text: Implications for Teaching Academic Writing". Her paper focuses on the organizational aspect of coherence and cohesion, describing an attempt to increase awareness of thematic structure by encouraging students to perform the same analysis in their own writings, and thus improve their written competence.

The final three papers of this issue reflect our policy of providing a forum for different perspectives and styles of communicating with an academic audience. Firstly, Jennifer Smith provides us with a different angle on the value of EFL programmes in "The Contribution of EFL Programs to Community Development in China". Her research is situated in a small northeastern city but is arguably relevant to development programmes throughout Asia. Smith argues for a different type of assessment when evaluating the cost/benefits of EFL programs by considering issues of community development.

Should the first person be excluded from academic discourse? The *Asian EFL Journal* is always interested in alternative styles of sharing experience with fellow academics. In "Developing "The Course" for College Level English as a Foreign Language Learners and Faculty Members in Vietnam", Greta Gorsuch shares her professional experience in Vietnam using a first person account as an interesting alternative to the usual research based structure.

In our September 2006 issue, we already highlighted a variety of views and approaches in relation to the Task-based learning. In this final piece a debate started in *ELTJ* is continued in

AEJ. Anthony Bruton, in "Description or prescription for task-based instruction?: A reply to Littlewood" takes issue with a recent proposal by Littlewood on the task-based approach in which he proposes two dimensions, task involvement and task focus, on which to place activities in the language classroom. We will be happy to publish powerfully argued reactions to this piece that make a contribution to this debate, particularly from contributors to the September issue.

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Academic Discussion Tasks: A Study of EFL Students' Perspectives

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Eunhee Han is a Ph.D. candidate at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania specializing in TESOL and Composition. She is currently working on her dissertation. She taught College English and Research English to undergraduate students at IUP. Prior to studies at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, she received an M.Ed. in Education specialty of English as a Second Language at Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Massachusetts. She has taught ESL Writing and Applied Linguistics classes at ENC and in the local community. Her research interests are in ESL/EFL teacher education, second language writing, and literacy studies.

Abstract

High level oral and aural language skills are needed to participate with native speakers in class discussions. This study reveals the findings from interview research where the researcher reports on the EFL graduate students' expressions of the particular difficulties and challenges in their academic programs needed to satisfy the oral skills based academic requirements for both male and female interviewees. 21 students from various graduate programs participated in this study. This study shows the EFL students' low satisfaction with their infrequent participation in the group discussion environment. EFL students tend to prefer small group discussions because they can participate in class discussion with less anxiety without being forced to compete within a larger group of native speakers. When EFL students participate in class discussion, insufficient content knowledge is a key issue which for most EFL students serves only to inhibit their active participation in class discussion. The amount of reading a student does to build a pre-class knowledge base for a given topic or issue insures a higher frequency of participation in class discussion.

Key Words: Oral/aural skills, discussion tasks

1. Introduction

Many EFL students come to America with high expectations and a driving desire to fulfill their academic goals despite difficult language barriers. Realistically, EFL students not only

need to overcome the challenge of their second language in order to meet the U.S. academic requirements, but also must understand the cultural education system when they step into the U.S. class environment. One of the crucial obstacles for EFL students' academic success is oral/aural skill for class participation. Speaking and listening skills block their enthusiasm and motivation to achieve their academic goals. Preparation for required speaking involvement in the classroom is much longer and complex for the EFL students. Oral participation and the contribution of ideas involve not only information to be disseminated, but diligent practice for presenting the contribution in an easily understood oral manner. This process assures extra hours of preparation and creates great stress for the students as they seek to compile information, practice presenting information and remain a contributing student in class through reading and research.

Ferris's (1988) survey, an analysis of the language needs of ESL university students in America, found that a large percentage (65-75%) of students responded as having struggles with class discussion participation. My study shows the voices of EFL Asian students in their oral/aural class discussion participation with students' expressions of their own opinions and thoughts as to how they see themselves speaking and listening in the classroom.

2. Research Background and Inquiry

Ferris (1998) examined the ESL students' perceptions of their own oral/aural skills in their class and their struggles to meet the challenges of oral/aural tasks and skills in academic settings. L2 students expressed their inhibition in class participation due to a general lack of confidence in their speaking skills (Ferris, 1998). Academic listening and speaking skills represent a complex and problematic task for L2 students.

For ESL students, L2 is not a comfortable language even though they have lived in the culture and have attended school in the U.S. These ESL students still feel that small group discussion and graded group projects in the L2 classroom generate much discomfort and many challenges in their general education program as well (Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

Based on Ferris's research, I approached this study of academic oral/aural skills in class discussion participation using Asian non-native English speakers. I assumed that the

interview would produce similar results concerning L2 students and their difficulties and problems with speaking and listening in the classroom. I wondered how these problems related directly to success in the classroom and to achieving their academic goals. Listening to their willingness to respond with honesty and openness to the interviewer's questions quickly illustrated their struggles and difficulties in pursuing their academic tasks to complete their personal academic goals in the L2 class settings.

The aim of this study is to compare the responses of Asian EFL students and their difficulties related to their speaking and listening skills as they orally participate in an academic graduate school setting to Ferris's research data.

The main questions that guided this interview are the following.

1. How often do ESL students participate in class discussion?
2. Does the size of the group matter?
3. What personal attitudes contributed to discussion participation?
4. What were their own difficulties in meeting these requirements?
5. What differences exist between L2 and L1 class settings in their oral/aural class participation?

This interview was limited to interviewees on only one university campus. Because the data being gathered was from a small number of graduate students on campus, qualitative comparisons between other groups of students are not possible.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The interview respondents were enrolled in various graduate schools at a large northeastern university in America. I chose to interview students only in the graduate level programs who had met the school admission requirements for international students. Admission criteria required a certain score on the TOEFL that assumed the students would have sufficient language proficiency in L2 to meet the subject-matter course requirements.

The interviewees were limited to international students from one of the Asian countries. Their native languages were Japanese, Thai, Chinese and Korean. 17 female and 4 male

interviewees agreed to my request for an interview. Their length of residence in the U.S. was between 1 year and 3 years. The majority of students, 14 out of 21, are majoring in English. The others have majors in business, chemistry, education, and physics.

3.2. Course overview

Before the interview, I determined my interviewees by the courses which they had previously taken or were presently taking. This question helped me to know the number of international students in each course. I also asked if the interviewees felt the oral class discussion had affected their course grade, and whether the course had either whole or small group discussion, or both methods within the one specific course.

The size of the class about which they responded had from 15 to 20 students. The largest class was a business class and the smallest class was a science class. There were about 5 to 10 L2 students in the class with 15 to 20 students. The L2 students were the majority in the business and science classes. All interviewees answered that participation in class discussion, both whole and small group, was counted as part of their course grade.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

I asked interviewees' L1 language group and nationalities prior to the interview. Permission to audio-tape each interviewee was requested. If it would make the interviewee uncomfortable to be recorded, they had the option to say no. All agreed to have their interview audio-taped. I chose not to record some parts of the interview while challenging the interviewees to use a conversational approach to the interview. The interview took place during the summer session of 2003 and the interviewees were graduate students enrolled in summer classes.

After the interview, I transcribed the interview without changing the grammatical errors or adding words to make a complete sentence. The next step was to offer the transcript to each interviewee. Each student looked over his or her interview transcript. I allowed each interviewee an opportunity to revise their interview. The interviewee also corrected parts of

the taped interview transcript where the meaning was unclear due to the students' unique accent or type of pronunciation.

The interview transcript was then examined. Differences and similarities with prior research were analyzed in order to find the L2 students' developmental needs in oral/aural skills in the U.S. class setting.

4. Results and Implications

4.1. Low satisfaction with participation in class discussion

Not many interviewees evaluated themselves as an active oral class participant. Only 5 out of 21 interview participants stated that they always speak out whether in the whole or small group class discussion. A large number of interviewees usually tried to be involved in the discussion as long as they understood the issue under discussion. This also indicates that the interviewees feel that they do not have enough understanding of content material in order to participate in the discussion. Ferris (1998) stated that instructors did not fully understand whether ESL students have or have not had to struggle to understand the content of the subject matter. Whereas, the comments of instructors indicated that the different cultural expectations cause ESL students trouble in class participation, ESL students felt the problem of class participation was from their lack of speaking ability and aural comprehension (Ferris, 1998). Many of the interviewees see content knowledge as one of the hurdles inhibiting their oral participation in class discussion (personal interview, June, 2003).

Korean: *I don't want make a mistake in my speaking or I don't want just say and … because sometimes I don't understand the reading … because I had no idea how to discuss … because as I said maybe I don't understand the content … so unless I don't understand I don't want to ask.*

Chinese: *This topic is … I think … it's very difficult for me … sometimes I just listen because I don't know … what can I say? That's the point.*

Thai: *First of all we have to read and we have to understand the chapters in order to analysis or discuss the point but I usually have problem reading. I don't understand clearly every time when I read and when I come to class I am still confused.*
Thai: I mean being lack of knowledge.
Chinese: *If I know the class a lot or the textbook a lot and the … I will participate a lot but I don't … I just sometimes I keep quiet in the class.*
Japanese: *I don't have any background about this series so I really … many times … I really don't understand what he talks about and what they talk about.*

However, some of the interviewed students indicated that the interest level and the personal relatedness of the topic served as an accelerator for encouraging participation in the oral discussion (personal interview, June, 2003).

Japanese: *If the chapters, if the readings very interesting for me and fit for my teaching settings, I want to participating in discussion. I want to share my knowledge and my experiences with my colleagues and for me as a chance to speak up in discussion.* Chinese: *If the topic unfamiliar … I am interested … I try to participate.*

Thus, lack of participation in class discussion by L2 students suggests that they have reading difficulties prior to class discussion. Interest, however, was also a factor to participate in discussion. The class discussion difficulties of the L2 students are not only in the form or constructs of speaking but may begin earlier during the gathering of information from given reading materials. To be an active and consistent participant in class discussions implies that ESL students need to be engaged in in-depth reading before getting into the class discussion.

4.2 L2 students' lack of English proficiency inhibits class discussion participation

In prior research, Ferris (1998) pointed out that class participation and interaction with English native speakers are barriers to overcome in the L2 class because of a general lack of confidence in the students' L2 speaking and listening skills. Throughout the interview

process almost all of the interviewees expressed that their English proficiency was lacking regardless of the graduate student status showing their English proficiency was strong enough to amply qualify them to meet graduate school admission requirements (personal interview, June, 2003). Speaking ability and aural comprehension can inhibit learning achievement when L2 students do not have confidence in their class participation (Ferris, 1998).

Korean: *If I have good, better proficiency of English, it is true … yeah …involve the group discussion or whole group discussion more …whenever discussion I felt depressed.*
Korean: *Because of my confidence that means language … what if they don't understand my English … I don't understand what's going on …that's listening problem so that I don't know how to response.*
Thai: *I have no confidence.*
Thai: *It's my language proficiency … if you are too quiet because of our language proficiency, our speaking.*
Japanese: *It's very hard for me … I want to concentrate on listening … I am so stressful.*
Korean: *Because English is my second language and then I feel uncomfortable when I speak in English specially in class and I always feel that my English makes people awkward … my English is confusing people sometimes … I am sure that … I feel … I am not sure that my English is correct or not.*

Other concerns mentioned by L2 students in Ferris's survey and my interviewees were class discussion participation difficulties arising when the professor or English native speakers mumbled, used slang, other unfamiliar vocabulary, and spoke too fast (Ferris, 1998).

Japanese: *Native students talk very fast … sometimes … I don't understand what they talk about so … I have to always pay attention to them but impossible always.*
Chinese: *I can not understand the native speakers … I just can not catch their pace.*

Korean: I can not understand what the native speakers speak sometime they speak very fast and they usually use slang, idioms.

As I interviewed these L2 students, I understood how their perception of their English ability inhibits oral participation in class discussion. Even though their academic non-verbal learning process may be good and actually help their language learning process, their speaking skill development may often lag behind because of their cultural inhibitions.

4.3. L2 students prefer small group discussion

Most of my interview participants expressed that being an L2 student had lowered their frequency of class participation. However, when asked their preference between whole and small group discussion, 19 out of 21 participants mentioned they like to be engaged in small group discussion. They pointed out that in a small group discussion; they have more opportunities to share their ideas (personal interview, June, 2003).

Thai: *I like discussion in small group all the time because in a small group I can talk and my peers listen to me and they can ask me questions … it's more interactive for me.* *Korean: You have more opportunity … I think they are more open.*
Chinese: *I prefer a small group discussion because in small group discussion people question will more specific.*

Another benefit of a small group is the supporting bridge of personal relationships which further encourages participation in a small group. Many of the interviewees responded positively to the environment of a small group. The comfort and group support of the small group encouraged the frequency of their oral participation (personal interview, June, 2003).

Thai: *I think it's more comfortable because I think it's easier to participate to speak out.*
Korean: *I don't like to say something in front of people … small group is more comfortable.*
Japanese: *In the small group discussion I feel kind of security feeling.*

Chinese: *I feel more comfortable in small group.*

Thus, I noticed that many L2 students were not comfortable speaking out in the total class, not just because of their speaking skill but also because of limited experience in discussion participation. Basturkmen (2002) stated that academic speaking is complex and indirect because it includes the speaker as well as the participants in public.

4.4. Cultural background inhibits L2 students' class discussion participation

A number of interviewees mentioned that their cultural educational background blocks class discussion participation which affects their L2 performance in class. For example, in Thailand, there is almost no class discussion. Students tend not to answer the professors' questions or raise a question because they worry about a potential difference of opinion with their professors. A Thai native speaker expressed that if the professor were not present, she would talk more freely (personal interview, June, 2003). The implication is Thai students bring their cultural background to the American class which effectively blocks their participation in the presence of the professor.

Thai: *In my country, I don't think participation is important … with Thai teaching style, the teacher, he never require the point for everybody who want to participate or join the class … he never mention about that thing … I know that my opinions is maybe totally different from the professor's opinion, I think I will not say it out … if the student have the different idea … sometimes it's hard to convince him, some of them do not accept the student's opinion.*
Thai: *Even though she should ask question, nobody answer … I think professor get bore … keep talking … only professor … yeah, almost none … without professor.*

A Japanese native speaker expressed that English native speakers interrupt the L2 speakers' spoken contributions to the whole group or small group discussion; however, when he participates in group discussions in a Japanese classroom setting, people wait until he finishes his speech.

Japanese: *Speech style is different … in the United States English speaking people … I talk something, they response me, just nodding, and yes, I see, really? … But Japanese someone talks we have to wait he or she finishes.*

These cultural differences can positively impact the class by giving more opportunities to participate in class to compare and contrast cultural views and perspectives on issues and topics. In a multi-cultural setting, the setting pressures each person to verbally participate, to identify, and to promote his or her own culture.

Japanese: *If we talk in Japanese that means we have same culture so I don't have to talk about … like this is different situation in here … when I talk with like people from different country I have to … sometimes if I know I can compare and then I can let them know like this is the different point.*

Ferris (1998) stated that the L2 students from different cultural expectations and settings struggle with class participation. I, however, found IUP graduate students were different from the L2 students surveyed by Ferris. IUP students eagerly expressed themselves concerning their cultural and language difficulties during their U.S. tenure. Ferris & Tagg's (1996) survey of U.S. professors noted that ESL students need to speak, in order to overcome cultural inhibitions and to learn how to participate using oral/aural skills. Asians in particular have difficulty with active participation because of their cultural differences in learning styles.

Therefore, the U.S. professors and my Asian interviewees agreed that the cultural and subsequent educational background inhibits L2 students' oral discussion performance in the L2 class setting. Furthermore, the clash of cultural patterns and resulting inhibitions serves as a block to new information and profitable interaction with the western culture and its educational learning styles.

4.5. Self-perceptions of L2 students' comparing/contrasting class discussion participation in L1 verses L2 class

L1 performance skills, such as speaking and listening, come naturally to L1 speakers. Assuming this, I asked all of my interviewees to express what differences might occur in their class discussion participation level if they were in L1 class setting. The most common response was that they were more comfortable in their native setting and this would increase their participation level (personal interview, June, 2003). L2 students continually use as a base of reference and comparison their L1 class setting even during their L2 class participation. The implication here is that the L2 students struggle with active class participation in the U.S. classroom but would not have the same high stress level if the class participation were in their native setting, free from any language interruption of their learning process.

Chinese: *There is no problem for me use native language.*
Korean: *If I have some idea to say, I can say in my native language.*
Thai: *I understand almost hundred percent … we can talk, we understand the content better … I can follow the discussion much better … I can bring up some questions about problems that I don't understand and ask my peer to explain.*
Japanese: *If the class were taught in Japanese maybe I always speak up.*
Korean: *If I participate in the oral discussion in Korean language, I think I can participate more often than discussion in English.*

However, some interviewees expressed that the L1 or L2 class setting was not an issue; their real concern was the topic to be discussed and their own familiarity with that topic (personal interview, June, 2003). That is, various academic disciplines approach this problem of active class participation by providing questions to clarify the content to be used in the class setting. Several graduate students increased their participation in class discussion by focusing on the topic and its clarity. Prior research of American professors reflects their

admiration of the L2 students' motivation and subsequent academic achievements (Ferris & Tagg, 1998).

Thai: *When I have question, I need to clear that question, so I just ask.*
Chinese: *I don't see the topic, depends of the topic … I am familiar or not …*
Japanese: *I really focus on the content. If in Japanese university, they talk about sociolinguistics, I don't know about sociolinguistics even I read article … of course I understand … it is easy just to talk … but opinion should be reflect my own something in the background … if I take the course in Japanese will be not so big difference.*

4.6. Other comments on participation in class discussion

Due to the difficulties of speaking and listening in class discussion, a Korean native speaker pointed out the need for a language class at her program school in U.S. which emphasizes oral/aural skills. Ferris (1998) also noted that ESL students expressed the need to have an additional oral/aural skill training course which would enhance their listening comprehension, conversation and formal presentation.

Korean: *I want to the courses that focus on listening and speaking proficiency improvement.*

All of the interview participants, except one student, expressed that their professors and peers supported them to become more involved in class discussion. A supportive and constructive class environment helps L2 students to improve their speaking and listening skills. In addition, through their oral/aural class discussion, L2 students are able to see their English learning curve consistently improve.

5. Conclusions

L2 students strive diligently to overcome the language barriers in U.S. universities in order to find success in their particular academic fields. When L2 students are exposed to academically required class and group discussion techniques, the oral/aural language skills

become a high hurdle for the L2 students to overcome. Interestingly, both the L2 students and the U.S. professors are searching for the reason why the L2 students experience such an inhibition toward the active use of their speaking and listening skills in a class or small group discussion.

My study of participation in academic class discussion has helped identify several problematic areas of which L2 students and teachers need to be aware. First, when L2 students participate in the class discussion, insufficient content knowledge is a key issue which for most L2 students serves only to inhibit their active participation in class discussion. The individual L2 students' amount of reading to build a pre-class knowledge base for a given topic or issue insures a higher frequency of participation in class discussion. When L2 students gain confidence in their knowledge, then they are more motivated to participate freely in the oral discussion.

Secondly, L2 students' participation in the extremely difficult class discussion must be achieved through self-motivation. Continued participation is the only way to get over the inhibitions that arise from the L2 students' feelings, brought on by their lack or perceived lack of English proficiency. That is, in order to facilitate comprehension of the discussion topic, L2 students need to speak out, ask questions, and add ideas throughout the class discussion. Even though the difficulty level is very high, the L2 students must have frequent interaction not only with the professor, but also their peers in the classroom. Furthermore, by pre-developing discussion strategies the L2 students can predict the challenges related to interaction with their peers and professors as well. This process helps the L2 students break the major barriers to participation.

Finally, L2 students need to realize that they are in a U.S. class which is vastly different from their native language education system. What are the expectations of the U.S. educational system? What seems to be its basic focus? What contributions can the L2 students make from their own cultural systems to achieve a balance with the U.S. educational system? As the L2 students become more familiar with the U.S. class environment, their ability to discuss with topic comprehension will become more evident.

L2 students have the benefit of studying abroad. This provides opportunities for the L2 students to compare and contrast with their own cultures' educational systems. It opens the potential for adopting a unique and integrated new system for the student in his or her own professional development. Many potential benefits exist in spite of the difficulties to achieve success in the academic arena of speaking and listening. Ferris and Tagg (1996) stated that "ESL students need to move out of their comfort zone in preparing for college course work" (p. 313). Speaking and listening skills are not the only problematic areas in the academic discussion task. Pre-reading to build a content base for the discussion topic will help provide the L2 students with the structure for guiding his or her thought during the discussion time period. This pre-preparation will enhance the students' listening ability while making it possible for the L2 students to positively participate academically in the discussion class. This increased confidence will strengthen the students' oral language learning curve.

Note

1. All excerpts from the audio taped are used with permission.

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Discourse Markers in Academic Lectures

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Abstract

With the expansion of English, academic English has established itself a firm position in curricula for all university fields. Consequently, the need for research into the processes underlying academic performance in English has increased. The aim of the present study was to gain insight into the effect of discourse markers on academic listening comprehension of university students in English as a foreign language setting. Two groups of students listened to two different versions of a lecture. The two versions were different according to quantity and type of discourse markers. Listening comprehension tests and their mean scores were compared. The findings clearly indicate that subjects comprehended the lecture better when discourse markers were included than when they were deleted. The findings have implications for material designers, teachers, teacher trainers, and lecturers and provide suggestions for further research.

Key words: Discourse markers, English for Academic Purposes, Academic lectures.

Introduction

Interest in learning English has increased to such an extent that English is now considered by many researchers to be an international language (McKay, 2002). In expanding circle (Kachru, 1992) 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 a variety of English that can somehow be taught/learned as a value-free system. It is believed that in EAP, the teaching of language can be separate from the dominant culture attached to it. Therefore, EAP has increasingly expanded so that currently it forms a considerable part of the curricula for all academic fields at university.

In parallel to the EAP programs, a considerable amount of research has been conducted and reported concerning the description of academic discourse in English (Flowerdew, 2002, p. 2). Academic lecture, as one type of academic discourse, is an important part of most university fields worldwide. The ability to comprehend academic lectures in English is thus an important need for university students (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992).

Some researchers (Long, 1985; Flowerdew, 1994; MacDonald, Badger, and White, 2000) have investigated the features of lectures (repetitions, paraphrases, rate of speech, authenticity, and syntactic complexity) that might aid L2 learners' comprehension. However, the role of discourse markers in aiding listening comprehension has not been fully explored yet.

Additionally, while several researchers have studied discourse markers from the descriptive and contrastive perspectives, there is a relative lack of experimental work on this topic. In order to fill the gap in research, this study investigates the effect of the use of discourse markers in academic listening comprehension of Iranian university students. The research is based on the premise that the knowledge derived from this investigation will provide insights to facilitate the academic listening comprehension.

Discourse Markers

Theoretically, discourse markers are a functional class of verbal and non-verbal devices which provide contextual coordination for ongoing talk (Schiffrin, 1987). Discourse markers are "metalingual comments" in which the speaker specifically comments on how what he is saying is to be taken (Brown & Yule, 1989). It is clear that the thematized metalingual comments are not integrated with the representation of content which the recipients are constructing. They merely give them directions about the type and structure of mental representation they should be constructing. Fraser (1993) believes that discourse markers are one type of commentary pragmatic marker. Fraser divides discourse markers into discourse topic markers, discourse activity markers, and message relationship markers. Each type has a list of markers. According to Hyland (1999), in expert to non-expert communication discourse markers help to present information in a clear, convincing and interesting way in an effort to promote acceptance and understanding. Discourse markers are an important persuasive resource used to influence listeners' reactions to texts according to values and established conventions of a given discourse community.

Several studies have discussed the positive effects of the presence of discourse markers in texts (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Williams, 1992). The presence of more global discourse makers and phrases which signal a change in topic or point of emphasis appears to aid recall in lectures (MacDonald et al. 2000). Flowerdew and Tauroza (1995, 449) found that the presence or absence of lower level discourse markers, "words that speakers use to mark relationships between chunks of discourse such as *so, well, OK*, and *now"* aids comprehension.

Chaudron & Richards (1986) found that macro-markers help more than micro-and macro-markers together and more than micro-markers alone in second language learners' understanding and recall of lectures. However, Dunkel and Davis (1994) study indicated that discourse markers do not assist L2 listeners in comprehending English-medium lectures. Inspired by Chaudron & Richards' (1986) research, Perez & Macia (2002) conducted an exploratory study to find out to what extent the presence or absence of discourse markers effect comprehension as perceived and reflected upon by students and to see if students

notice the presence or absence of discourse markers in a lecture. Their results suggest that students' level of language proficiency in English and different types of discourse markers present in lectures are two intervening factors that influence the level of listening comprehension. This research expands the previous studies to other contexts and focuses on the role of discourse markers on listening comprehension of Iranian EAP students. In EAP courses in Iran, the focus is mostly on written texts and students do not have much access to spoken discourse. Listening comprehension of academic discourse is a required skill and therefore it needs to be addressed in EAP/ESP courses. Students need to be able to understand academic information presented in English at professional conferences in their academic fields and therefore focus on the comprehension of academic lectures as an area of study is worthwhile.

Academic Lectures

Academic lectures have been identified as a register distinct from written text or conversation (Flowerdew, 1994; MacDonald et al.; 2000; Morell, 2004). Obviously, lectures tend to be monologic and relatively planned with respect to the content. Still a certain amount of adjustment and unplanned speech can be evident, indicative of the lecturer's awareness of listener's presence and needs (Chaudron, 1995).

With the status of English as an international language and the expansion in the use of English an increasing number of second language learners are engaged in academic pursuits that require them to listen to and comprehend great amounts of second language input. Academic lecture, as one type of academic discourse, is an important part of most university fields worldwide. The ability to comprehend academic lectures in English is thus an important need for university students (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992).

In recent years, applied linguists working in academic settings have increased our knowledge concerning academic listening tasks and their significance for second language teaching and learning. Some researchers have dealt with the macro structure of lectures (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Young, 1994), others have analyzed the rhetorical function of introductions (Thompson, 1994), others with interactional practices of lecture

comprehension (Morell, 2004), and yet others have investigated the use of specific variables in lectures. Flowerdew (1994) is one the most comprehensive publications on this topic which includes specific papers dealing with cognitive discoursal, ethnographic and pedagogical issues involved in academic listening and lecture comprehension.

The use of discourse markers in academic lectures has been investigated by other scholars (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Perez & Macia, 2002). A prominent characteristic of lectures is the use of certain lexical phrases or rhetorical markers which help to signal the major content and sequence in argument, and to demarcate boundaries of non-essential information. These have attracted researchers' attention both for their inherent usefulness in understanding the structure of the discourse, and as-potential aids in training listeners to understand better (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Morell, 2004). Nattinger & Decarrico (1992) display at some length the differences in such forms between less and more formal lecture styles, making the further distinction between "global" and "local" macro-organizers. Strodt-Lopez (1991) shows that asides, which have identifiable markers, are important features of lectures that maintain audience-speaker rapport and may in fact clarify the speaker's orientation to the main points.

Discourse markers signal the information structure of discourse by emphasizing directions and relations within discourse. Nonetheless, the research regarding the role of discourse markers in listening comprehension is meager (Perez & Macia, 2002). The present study, therefore focuses on the use of discourse markers in academic lectures in an EFL setting. Thus, we are dealing with a context of language learning that has not been the focus of most academic lecture comprehension studies.

Methodology

Subjects

The participants of this study were 72 EAP students. There were 14 male and 58 female students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language at Najafabad Azad University. All the students were native speakers of Persian. They aim to be teachers of English at the secondary level or enter a field where expert use of the English language is required. The

students had at least 6 years of formal education in English. The participants were enrolled in language lab two and language lab three courses which are part of the bachelors' degree curriculum for students majoring in English. These courses are designed in order to improve the listening comprehension of the students. The reason for using students from this academic discipline was to ensure a certain level of language proficiency (intermediate or above) required for discourse markers to be noticed and to show their facilitating effect (Perez & Macia, 2002). The participants were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control. To assess their language proficiency a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) which included three parts of listening comprehension section; structure section; and vocabulary and reading comprehension section was used and based on the students' scores which were between 350-450, they were categorized as intermediate to upper intermediate EAP students. The TOEFL test was chosen from the book "Reading for TOEFL". The result of the proficiency test (see tables 1 and 2 below) showed no significant difference between the two groups in terms of language proficiency in general and listening comprehension in particular.

Table 1

Distribution of Groups and Results of the Language Proficiency Test

	Group 1	Group 2
Number of students	34	38
Sample mean	375	390
Standard deviation	70.6	76.7

P<.05

Table 2

Distribution of Groups and Results of the Listening Comprehension Section of TOEFL

	Group 1	Group 2
Number of students	34	38
Sample mean	30	32
Standard deviation	5.05	6.01

P<.05

Materials

Three academic texts were used for this study. The texts were selected from the materials that students typically encounter in their classes. Two versions of the same lectures were used. The two versions of the three texts differed only in the amount of discourse markers used. An assistant lecturer from the U.S. was asked to prepare a talk based on the three texts provided by the researcher. The version submitted, which included discourse markers, served as the baseline. Two other native speakers in addition to the researcher examined the scripted listening comprehension texts to make sure the texts have an appropriate number and type of discourse markers and added a few more (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Murphy & Candlin, 1979). Another version of the three texts was made in which discourse markers which were not necessary for the propositional content of the texts were removed. The two versions of the lecture were scripted taking special care to make it resemble a speech (extracts from the texts are listed below with the discourse markers italicized). Based on Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981) categorization of lectures, the present study deals primarily with lectures in the reading style. That is, the lecturer reads from notes, or speaks as if he was reading from notes. This reading style for lectures is typical of the lectures students hear in English language labs and at conferences. The native speaker delivered both versions of the three lectures, reading aloud at a normal rate of speech. Table 3 below gives the details on the composition of the three lectures.

Table 3

Features of the Two Versions of the Three Lectures

Features	First Lecture		Second Lecture		Third Lecture	
	Without marker	With marker	Without marker	With marker	Without marker	With marker
No. of words	424	456	305	329	438	473
Duration of lectures	4.00	4.35	2.35	3.00	3.55	4.35
Average rate of delivery (wd/min)	108	107	119	114	114	112

The following summarizes the steps taken to construct the lectures used in this study:

1. Three texts selected from textbooks.
2. An educated native speaker in the field was asked to give a lecture based on the provided texts with extra care for the inclusion of discourse markers.
3. Lectures were scripted and a few more discourse markers (both textual and interpersonal) were added to the scripted lectures.
4. A second version of the scripted lectures was prepared by omitting the discourse markers which were not necessary for the propositional content of lectures.
5. Both text versions were checked for authenticity by two educated native speakers and necessary adjustments made (one was judged as dry and stiff and the other one as more user friendly and more informal in tone).

The lectures with more discourse marker were delivered to group 1 and the ones without were delivered to group 2.

The first lecture was on 'Productivity of language' from the book *The Study of Language*, the second one on 'Learning a native language', from the book *The Foreign Language Learners*, and the third one on 'Adapting readings to encourage slower readers from *Forum*.

The extracts were analyzed in terms of the quality and quantity of discourse markers found in them. The classification and analysis of discourse markers was based on functional criteria, drawing both on the analysis of lecture and on the study of different classifications proposed from functional perspective (Hyland, 2000; Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993). Two main types of discourse markers, textual and interpersonal were identified and used in our classification.

Table 4

Classification of Discourse Markers

	Category	Function	Examples
Markers Textual	Frame markers	Signal or preview a discourse act or text phase (i.e., indicate topic shift, show sequence, mark main transitions)	*Now let's turn to…; before going into..; first, second;*

	Code glosses	Help in understanding a particular text element (i.e., clarify, explain, rephrase, or exemplify propositional meaning)	*For instance, that is, such as, in other words;*
	Logical connectives	Express relations between clauses/sentences	*However, and, therefore, but, still;*
	Evidentials	Refer to other information sources (i.e.., provide support for the speaker's arguments)	*Because of increasing evidence; as it is mentioned by other scholars*
	Endophoric markers	That refer to other parts of the lecture	*As I mentioned before; Throughout the lecture;*
	Illocutionary markers	Naming the act the speaker performs or announcing the speaker's intentions	*I 'd like to discuss; I shall highlight; I have attempted to compare;*
Interpersonal Markers	Boosters	Express communicative force or the speaker's certainty and commitment to the statement	*There is no such thing as… , of course, plain and simply, for sure, definitely,*
	Hedges	Modify the speaker's commitment to the proposition	*Perhaps, mostly, may, might, it appears that…, I think…*
	Attitude markers	Express speaker's stance/attitude towards the propositional content	*The more interesting part is…, it is my opinion that, strangely enough…*
	Relational markers	Create relationship/rapport with the audience (i.e., rhetorical questions, direct appeals to the audience, etc.)	*You may think that …, Can we learn from….? Don't you think …?*
	Person markers	First person pronouns indicating the speaker's presence	*"I"*

Examples from the texts

Frame marker + booster *must+ person marker (The first issue we must consider is that ….)*

Code gloss (*For example, Cicadas have 4 signals……)*

Logical connectives *(In contrast, the human…..)*

Code gloss to expand on the concept of '*productivity*' (*….has been termed productivity, which means…)*

Code gloss to further explain *two opposing forces* (*On the one hand ….)*

Frame marker + hedging verb (*…it seems best at this stage to have some engaging activities for ……)*

It should be noted that one discourse marker could be assigned to more than one category. For example, this indirect rhetorical question acts both as a frame marker, indicating a topic shift, and as relational device:

…. you might be wondering what the difference is between human language and nonhuman signaling…..

In other cases, one marker was found to be embedded within a larger discourse marker unit. The following frame marker indicates a change of topic (*Now, let's turn to…)* and includes an attitude marker (*…the more important issue related to* …), -nevertheless, as part of an idiomatic expression, it was not counted as such.

Example extract from Lecture 3 (Encouraging slow readers) with discourse markers

Lecture –With

Today I am going to talk about the adaptations in reading activities that teachers can use to encourage the slower readers to read faster. What I am going to cover may sound familiar to those of you who have given your students some in-class reading.

In our classes, there are some students who finish reading the assigned text quickly and breeze through the post reading exercises. *However, there are* other students who may still be reading and haven't even started the exercises. Many may be leafing through dictionaries. *It is not uncommon for* students who finished first to be *perhaps* chatting, and the slower students to be showing annoyance.

Table 5

Frequency of Discourse Markers in the Two Lecture Versions

		Text 1		Text 2		Text 3	
		Version A	Version B	Version A	Version B	Version A	Version B
Textual Markers	Frame markers	3	2	3	2	4	3
	Code glosses	6		5		4	
	Logical connectives	5	3	6	2	5	2
	Evidentials			2		1	
	Endophoric markers	2	1	1	1	3	1
	Illocutionary markers	1		2			
Interpersonal Markers	Boosters	2		3		3	
	Hedges	4		3		5	
	Relational markers	2		1		2	
	Attitude markers	2		3		3	
	Person markers	1		1		2	
Total		28	6	30	5	32	6

A multiple choice test of listening comprehension which included 16 items checking for both global and local understanding was designed and administered to both groups of participants. Each lecture was followed by 5-6 multiple choice questions which tapped into factual, inferential, and global understanding of the lectures. All three lectures and the questions were read by a native speaker of English, tape recorded and presented orally to EAP students in a language laboratory. The listening comprehension test had a high reliability (KR-21 r=.87). Additionally, Pearson product-moment correlations calculated

between the dependent listening comprehension test scores and the TOEFL listening comprehension test scores were significant (r=.76).

Data Analysis

The mean performance of the two groups on the listening comprehension test was compared by using an independent sample two-tailed *t*-test, with a .05 level of significance required to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant differences between the two groups .

Results

Table 6 illustrates the results of the *t*-test analyses for the listening comprehension test. Out of the maximum score of 16, the mean scores were 10.62 for group 1 and 8.93 for group 2. The difference between the two means was statistically significant at 0.05.

Table 6

Listening Comprehension Test Results Compared between the 2 Groups

	N	Mean Score	SD	*t*-value	Level of significance	df.
Group 1 (with markers)	34	10.62	3.86	2.004	0.05	70
Group 2 (without markers)	38	8.93	2.91			

As shown in table 6 there is a significant difference between the performances of the two groups. Group 1 who listened to the lectures with discourse markers outperformed the other group.

Discussion

The statistical analysis of the mean scores produced evidence that the extracts containing discourse markers were more comprehensible than the extracts without. The findings revealed that the more extensive use of frame markers in which the author's intentions are signaled and the concepts are introduced before exemplification, and the discourse pattern of introduction of concept followed by an example, facilitates the listening comprehension of

EAP students. This pattern provides the listeners with repetition and reinforcement of the content. It is also worth noting that the three extracts for group 1 (with discourse markers) make the most use of person markers, which tends to support the idea that this form of speaker-audience solidarity promotes comprehension (Crismore, 1989; Morell, 2004). Furthermore using hedges to mitigate the speaker's authorial stance may render the lectures more user-friendly.

In general, the results of this study lend further support to the idea that discourse markers have a positive influence on comprehension. The greater presence of some types of discourse markers (e.g., frame markers, person markers, hedges, and glosses) could be linked to the better performance of the first group. However, it should be noted that the students in this study were judged to be at intermediate level of language proficiency based on the TOEFL test result. A large-scale study with more participants and more levels of language proficiency (e.g., Perez & Macia, 2002) would yield more reliable statistics. Additionally, only multiple choice test of listening comprehension was used as a dependent variable in this study. Other global measures such as Cloze test, or summary tasks may add to the validity of the study and provide us with more insights. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that discourse markers as a topic of research in ESP/EAP listening comprehension, teaching, and material design deserve attention. It would seem that certain types of discourse markers (interpersonal/textual; macro/micro) may be more facilitating than others during listening. For instance, the findings of a study by Chaudron & Richards (1986) showed that the combination of micro-macro markers did not seem to help students understand the lecture as much as micro and macro discourse markers alone. It would be valuable to set up more articulated experiments that isolate these different forms of discourse markers in order to determine their effect on listening comprehension of different types of texts for different levels of language proficiency and in different disciplines.

Conclusion

A psycholinguistic approach (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992) to lecture comprehension such as the one adopted in this study yields results which are useful for language processing in

relation to second language lecture comprehension. The findings of this study also have wider implications within the content of lecturing in English to speakers of other languages.

Practical implications of this study suggest that our findings may be used to determine instructional actions to be undertaken in different teaching contexts. Students should be made aware of the presence, importance, and facilitating effects of discourse markers for academic lecture comprehension. From the textual viewpoint, students can be asked to identify instances of frame markers previews and then predict content. Attention to logical connectives will help students analyze the writer's/speaker's line of reasoning and rhetorical strategies. Tracing endophoric markers can help students understand the macro structure of a text and also encourage them to retain and build on newly acquired knowledge (Steffensen & Cheng, 1996). On the interpersonal level, students can look for hedges, boosters, and first person pronouns and reflect on why the speaker has chosen to use these features. Attitude markers can prompt students to contribute their own idea and thus critically react to the text. This research not only heightens our understanding of the listening process and different intervening factors, but would hopefully lead to more effective teaching methodologies and will provide more criteria for the selection of materials for ESP listening instruction. Lastly, the use of discourse markers can be considered as an area of strategic competence that can be taught and may have an immediate effect on comprehension. This means that nonnative speakers can compensate for skills that they lack by using appropriate strategies.

In conclusion, our study has revealed the facilitative effect of discourse markers in the comprehension of lectures in a second language. The findings show that how the academic content should be delivered to the student is of high significance and that content lecturers should consider how best they could assist the students to cope with the academic system of education faster and better.

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Collaborating Together: Linked Intercultural Learning Activities for Undergraduate Japanese and American Students

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Bio Data:

Linda Heuser has taught sociology courses in English to Japanese students for the past 15 years. During that time, she has used a variety of pedagogical approaches such as service-learning and linked courses to enhance the educational experiences for students. A number of her publications have been devoted to describing these different instructional techniques.

Abstract

A sociologist, linguist, and Applied English professor designed a joint curriculum for Japanese students enrolled in an American Society course and for American students registered for a Modern Japanese Society and Culture course. Students collaboratively engaged in a series of short-term linked tasks, conducted in English, related to the topics of dating, weddings, elementary education, and the sempai-kohai relationship. Additionally, seven groups, with equal representation from Japanese students and American students, worked on a semester-long project in which they researched, scripted, and acted out a play about dating or weddings. Written from the sociologist's perspective, this paper tells our story about how, grounded pedagogically in intercultural learning and learning communities, we used these activities as a way to increase students' intercultural competence and language fluency.

Keywords: intercultural learning, intercultural competence, language learning, task-based learning, collaborative education, learning communities

Introduction

As Morgan (1998), O'Dowd (2003), and Otten (2003) acknowledge, intercultural competence and language proficiency do not automatically occur by simply bringing

together students from different cultures. On the contrary, achievement of these objectives requires shared reflection about social experiences through carefully structured language tasks central to the process of intercultural learning (Candlin, 1987; Muller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd, 2003). Moreover, involving students collaboratively in experiential, meaning-negotiation situations (Muller-Hartmann, 2000) provides not only opportunities for linguistic interaction (Met, 1994), but the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills central to Byram's (1997) notion of intercultural competence.

Appreciating the value of teaching culture and language as an integrated whole (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001) and embracing a pedagogical approach that foregrounds cooperative, task-based learning (Muller-Hartmann, 2000), we, a sociologist, linguist, and Applied English professor, created what we termed a joint curriculum for Japanese students enrolled in a sheltered content course called American Society and for American students registered for a course entitled Modern Japanese Society and Culture (later referred to as Japanese Society). As one component of intercultural learning, we designed a series of linked activities for students around the topics of dating, weddings, and elementary education. Short-term tasks, conducted in English, included playing an intercultural card game, working in pairs to compare Japanese and American electronic dating websites, preparing questions for and listening to speakers' panels on intercultural marriage and the sempai-kohai relationship (the association between elders and juniors in Japanese schools, companies, and so forth and the formal/informal rules governing their behaviors), and watching and talking about a video concerning Japanese elementary education. Forming seven groups, with three Japanese students and three American students each, members also undertook a semester-long project in which they researched, scripted, and acted out a play related to dating or weddings.

This article, written from the sociologist's perspective, chronicles our story with one caveat. Being our first sojourn into this type of collaboration, we focused our time and energy on curriculum design, recognizing that future linkages must include a systematic assessment of content and language learning outcomes. As such, we describe a pedagogical model that

places a high priority on a process sensitive to the complexities of moving students beyond mere coexistence to active participation in cross-cultural exchange.

The Setting

The Japanese students enrolled in American Society attended a ten-month credit-bearing academic program at Tokyo International University of America (TIUA). Founded in 1989 through a partnership between Tokyo International University (TIU) in Kawagoe, Japan and Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, this institution, supporting global education and international exchange, serves approximately 100 Japanese sophomores and juniors annually who, while living and socializing with Americans, receive separate educational instruction. Beginning in February with a twelve week spring semester, students concentrate on cultural and language literacy under the supervision of TIUA Applied English faculty. During the six week intensive summer session and fifteen week fall semester, elective content offerings linked with Applied English courses make up the curriculum. These elective courses, taught by Willamette University professors, introduce students to subject matter such as sociology, psychology, literature, and history. The accompanying Applied English courses, staffed by TIUA faculty, then use the content for cultural, language, and study skills development.

American Society and its related Applied English course are one such pairing available each fall semester for interested TIUA students. We, the American sociologist and American Applied English professor assigned to these courses, routinely plan learning exercises geared toward exposing students to a wide variety of cultural and language experiences. Viewing our courses as inseparable, our foci, nonetheless, vary slightly with the sociologist attending to content through the use of language and the Applied English professor highlighting language abstracted from disciplinary-based materials. As a team who had worked together for eight years, we prized those teachable moments when we could connect students with their American peers. Thus, when asked by our Japanese colleague, a linguist who taught Japanese Society, to take part in linked activities with her American students, we eagerly accepted her gracious invitation.

Fortuitously, our courses enrolled equal numbers of students with 8 males and 13 females of sophomore or junior standing in American Society and 13 males and 8 females including freshmen to seniors in Japanese Society. TOEFL scores for the former group varied from 370-507, which, while low in certain cases, did not prove to be an insurmountable obstacle. In the end, we constituted an intercultural team of faculty and students about to embark on a new learning enterprise.

Pedagogical Orientation

Operating from the premises that all classroom pedagogy proceeded through interaction (Allwright, 1984) and that peers represented an important source of influence on intellectual and social development during the undergraduate years (Astin, 1993), we opted for a caring, relational style of collaboration among students in both courses. As Barr and Tagg (1995) discuss, our orientation emphasized the discovery and construction of knowledge among a community of learners. Consequently, students and faculty engaged in meaningful educational activities that took advantage of and celebrated our cultural and language differences (Adams, Harmon, Reneke, Thomasenia, Hartle, & Lamme, 1997).

Undeniably, our commitment to such an approach required extensive organization and coordination, since we intended to merge the content of three separate courses: American Society, Applied English, and Japanese Society. Scheduling five multi-hour meetings, we followed Minkler's (2002) advice by not only talking at length about our teaching philosophies, but collectively designing curricula and syllabi, devising common lesson plans, and conceiving of complementary activities reinforcing interdisciplinary links. Additionally, ongoing dialogue about our specific course objectives anchored each session.

Philosophically, we agreed that team work and carefully crafted linked activities would give students the opportunity to integrate learning through interactive experiences (Hamm & Adams, 2002). Moreover, we aspired to build a sense of community that involved consensus and conflict as students joined together in completing assigned group tasks (Harris, 1989; Wiley, 2001). To attain such ends, we consciously redefined ourselves as coaches (Barr &

Tagg, 1995) and guides (Hamm & Adams, 2002) rather than dispensers of authoritative knowledge.

In executing our plan, we realized that a number of crucial decisions had to be made. First, we determined that two of our three topic areas, mainly selected for their high level of student interest, would match: 1) interpersonal relationships, dating, and weddings and 2) elementary education. The remaining unit was left to the instructor's discretion with poverty and homelessness chosen in American Society and adolescence in Japanese Society. Second, we fixed our topic order, starting with dating and weddings followed by elementary education and ending with poverty or adolescence, thereby giving students ample time to complete their semester-long projects. Third, we came up with learning tasks that would, hopefully, promote a richer cultural and language exchange.

Ultimately, we divided these learning tasks into two tracks. Described later, Track 1 included one-time only linked activities featuring students and invited guest speakers who, as cultural informants, described and answered questions about electronic dating websites, intercultural marriage, elementary education, and sempai-kohai relationships. Especially for Japanese students, these exercises afforded them the opportunity to learn culture and language as they communicated with native speakers about familiar and stimulating topics, thereby increasing their motivation to speak (Olson, 2002; Rivers, 1988; Stoller, Hodges, & Kimbrough, 1995).

In Track 2, we created learning communities in which seven groups, with equal representation from Japanese students and American students, would carry out a long-term linked project on some aspect of dating or weddings. As a pedagogical approach, learning communities promoted an active process of learning wherein students used knowledge and personal experiences in cultivating sustained classroom alliances for academic and social gains (Harada, Lum & Souza, 2002-2003; Howard & England-Kennedy, 2001; Matthews & Smith, 1996). In accord with Coombe (1999), an ethic of caring undergirded these communities as we stressed respect for opposing opinions, personal connections among faculty and students, and a concern for the well-being of others (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1996; Noblit & Rogers, 1995).

Obviously, we faced the additional challenge of bringing together two culturally distinct groups, one of them whose members were non-native speakers. Mindful of this situation, intercultural learning became a core curricular principle through which students expanded their understanding of another culture's values, behaviors, and communication patterns while simultaneously raising awareness of their own (Bredella, 2003; Kaikkonen, 1997). As a result, intercultural learning coupled with learning communities helped us to achieve our overarching goal of intercultural competence.

Adopting Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence, our objectives adopted in each course, with varying degrees of emphasis, strove to:

- develop intercultural attitudes that demonstrated a willingness to decenter or relativize one's own beliefs,
- increase knowledge of social processes and their resulting products, and
- refine skills of discovery and interaction leading to the ability to interpret and apply what had been learned.

For the Japanese students in American Society and Applied English, language acquisition represented another chief objective. Subscribing to the position held by a growing number of educators (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Bryam & Morgan, 1994; Kramsch, 1983; Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Met, 1994; Muller-Hartmann, 2000), we wedded language learning with content learning. Hence, instructional exercises enabling students to regularly communicate with professors and their peers extended possibilities for linguistic interchange (Met, 1994).

To assist us in this intercultural undertaking, we hired a tutor who, given her rich and varied background, exemplified Bochner's (1986) version of a mosaic multicultural individual. Not only had she been a student at TIU in Japan and TIUA in the United States, she obtained a two-year scholarship to study and graduate from Willamette University. More than any other student we knew, she had become bicultural, preserving, even enhancing her Japanese identity, while displaying an intimate understanding and respect for American ways of life. In reality, her duties went far beyond her role as tutor, since she operated as our cultural and language liaison who identified and brokered instances of misunderstanding and

miscommunication. Being an internationally experienced person, she, as Wilson (1993) depicts, built bridges over which others could walk, a critical key to our success.

In the end, our pedagogical orientation embodied what Murray and Bollinger (2001) labeled as reactive autonomy in which teacher-directed learning activities, once initiated, transferred responsibilities to students who then organized resources and negotiated cultural and language differences in completing assigned tasks. Through their active contributions, they played an instrumental part in shaping the attitudes, knowledge, and skills central to their growth as interculturally competent adults (Candlin, 1987; Muller-Hartmann, 2000).

Linked Courses

For scheduling purposes, the sociologist planned to teach American Society in a 60 minute time slot on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. To insure a common time when Japanese students and American students could meet, the linguist and Applied English professor held their classes during the same 90 minute instructional period on Tuesdays and Thursdays when the sociologist was also available. As such, we arranged for students to come together on seven separate occasions over the 15 week semester to participate in the short-term and long-term linked activities described below.

Track 1: Short-Term Linked Activities

In American Society and Applied English, we adopted an educational model for linked activities taken from the field of service-learning that consisted of preparation, action, reflection, and evaluation (Rice, 1996). To prepare Japanese students, the sociologist offered content instruction about the upcoming short-term linked activity, the Applied English professor practiced English, and the cultural liaison/tutor provided academic and language support two evenings per week. Action entailed the actual coming together of Japanese students and American students as they collectively participated in these one-time only exercises under guided faculty supervision. Reflection gave Japanese students the chance, through various written and oral assignments, to process the meaning of these linked activities within the sociological framework presented to them during the preparation phase.

Finally, ongoing evaluation made it possible to tailor the curriculum to changing student and faculty needs.

Applying this model to our first unit on interpersonal relationships, dating, and weddings, we thought that an inspection of electronic dating websites might prove fascinating. As part of our advance preparation (see Table 1 for pre- and post-language exercises for each linked activity), Japanese and American students located websites from their respective countries that were then screened by the linguist for their appropriateness as shared learning tools. Additionally, the sociologist explored with Japanese students how dating practices in general and electronic dating specifically affected the mate selection process in the United States.

Our first linked meeting, representing the action phase, began by forming seven mixed groups, so Japanese students and American students could take part in an intercultural card game conceived by the Applied English professor. Drawing two cards from an age-related pile and a "slice of life" pile, student talked about their favorite food at age 5-6, their most beloved holiday costumes at 9-10, or their fondest memory of their grandparents at 13-14. By describing past memories and experiences, students found a common ground on which to interpersonally connect. In bridging what may have previously been perceived as an irreconcilable cultural and language gap, they could begin to see how it might be possible for them to work together on future linked activities.

Moving onto the subject of dating, we divided students into cross-cultural pairs whose assigned task was to access pre-approved Japanese and American dating websites, dialogue about their similarities and differences, and identify the underlying values made evident by this comparison. While a general discussion ensued, facilitated by the linguist, it was only during oral reflection in the next American Society class period when Japanese students realized that websites in their country had a more serious, family-oriented approach whereas American websites seemed somewhat casual and individualistic reinforcing idealistic notions of falling in love with the perfect mate.

Realizing the need for ongoing assessment, we judged our first linked activity as particularly successful in increasing students' awareness about their own beliefs, knowledge, and practices concerning interpersonal relationships and dating. Moreover, Japanese students

gained language experience in listening, speaking, and reading English together with their American peers. Nonetheless, we noted that American students dominated the general discussion, a fact that we attributed to the advantage of speaking in their native language and their greater familiarity with an interactive style of learning. To remedy this situation, we consciously incorporated a system of "turn-taking" to assure more equal participation in future linked activities.

Our next linked meeting occurred two weeks later after students in American Society received sociological and language instruction about weddings, alternative weddings, non-marital cohabitation, intermarriage, and intercultural marriage. On this occasion, Japanese students hosted the class session, a rotating responsibility, by greeting an American student at the classroom door and inviting her/him to sit together for the upcoming panel presentation. As a planned second activity, they heard from four professors and administrators from Japan, Ecuador, Germany, and Greece about their intercultural marriages to partners from Italy and the United States. After answering a common set of questions supplied to them by the sociologist, students queried the panelists. To avoid the possible domination by American students, Japanese students produced a list of questions in advance to which they referred when the sociologist, as panel facilitator, took turns soliciting their participation. Written reflections afterwards proved enlightening as Japanese students elaborated upon their newly found understanding of the complexities of intercultural marriage beyond what they had read about and discussed in American Society.

Prior to the next linked activity scheduled two weeks later, Japanese students' studied the United States' educational system through reading, lecture, conversation, and videos. Coming together with their American peers, they watched a 15 minute video about a typical day in a Japanese elementary school produced by the linguist. Adopting the protocol established earlier, each American student greeted a Japanese student and asked her/him to sit together for today's class session. After viewing the video, students, working in pairs, engaged in lively exchanges based on questions supplied by the linguist about school cleaning responsibilities, lunches, walking groups, classroom activities, and so on. Alternating between Japanese students and American students, the linguist asked them to

speculate about the reasons for these sometimes striking educational differences. Grounded in what they had learned during preparation and action, Japanese students in American Society further reflected orally and in writing about the larger social significance these intriguing cross-cultural insights evoked.

The fourth and last short-term linked activity involved a presentation about the sempai-kohai relationship by TIUA administrators and our own cultural liaison/tutor. Each guest speaker met with two mixed groups of Japanese students and American students to explain this relationship and answer their questions. Japanese students also acted as cultural informants contributing stories about their own sempai-kohai experiences. As such, American students learned firsthand about a style of interaction largely unknown to them in the United States.

In conclusion, Track 1 short-term linked activities, employing service-learning instructional techniques, served several key purposes: to initiate the formation of what we hoped to be close intercultural connections between students, to develop the interpersonal skills to work across cultures, and to acquire knowledge about the values and norms characterizing other ways of life. Such task-based learning afforded Japanese students the added benefit of practicing English with native speakers. Complimenting this type of collaboration, the Track 2 long-term linked group project offered another promising avenue for educating students interculturally.

Track 2: Long-Term Linked Group Project

Track 2 consisted of a long-term linked project that involved seven groups, with three Japanese and three American students each, who researched, scripted, and acted out a play about dating or weddings. We expected that Japanese students and American students would be excited about taking part in sustained cross-cultural work for two primary reasons. First, many American students had ties to Japan that included majoring in Japanese Studies, preparing to study in Japan, formerly residing in Japan, or descending from Japanese ancestry. Second, the majority of Japanese students, as survey results revealed over the years, came to TIUA to meet American people, study English, and experience American culture.

Thus, the project presented an extraordinary opportunity for both groups to satisfy some basic interests and needs.

Aware of their heightened curiosity about dating and weddings, we came up with 15 project options and requested that students rank their top three preferences. Based on their first, second, or third choice, we assigned them to one of the following groups: intercultural dating between a Japanese student and an American student (two project teams), interracial dating, intercultural marriage between a Japanese student and American student, interracial marriage, Navajo wedding ceremony, or homosexual commitment ceremony. During the same class session as the intercultural marriage panel, students received the announcement of their groupings. Gathering for their first official meeting, they greeted one another, exchanged contact information, and reviewed the project task list specifying the steps involved in project planning and implementation (Table 2).

In addition, students divided themselves into three pairs with one Japanese student and one American student each whose task was to find books, articles, and movies related to their chosen topic. As a complementary activity, the sociologist and linguist arranged 60 minute library training sessions for students to obtain special directions and a four page handout from one of the university librarians about locating hard copy and online resources in encyclopedias, magazines, and newspapers. The sociologist also developed a handout of her own detailing the proper format for putting together bibliographies. Likewise the Applied English professor prepared a series of language exercises geared toward helping Japanese students identify at least five references (for a group total of 15), type a bibliography, and understand the unfamiliar vocabulary used in articles and movies (see Table 2 for a listing of language exercises).

At the same time, groups organized regular planning meetings to consult and assign assorted tasks. As the semester progressed and students became more knowledgeable about their project topic, they turned their attention to script design. At this juncture, Japanese students worked on a script outline separate from American students to afford them greater latitude and comfort in generating their own ideas. To assist them in this effort, the sociologist and Applied English professor created two handouts that delineated how and

what to incorporate in their script proposals plus they devoted extra class time to answering questions and reviewing preliminary drafts.

Having approximately three weeks to generate an outline, Japanese students met outside of class to confer on script details such as characters, setting, and story line as well as dialogue, music, costumes, and props. At the first of three linked class meetings explicitly dedicated to project work, Japanese students distributed copies of their script outline to American students, summarized their ideas orally, and invited a collaborative exchange among all group members about how this proposal might be further expanded upon and improved. By the end of this class period, responsibility shifted to the American students who, enrolled in Japanese Society as a writing-centered course, were charged with transforming this outline into a more polished script due two weeks later.

Meeting together, we, the three professors and cultural liaison/tutor, read and critiqued their initial drafts. Returning our written comments to each group, we instructed them to make the necessary revisions before moving into the final two-week phase of production. A flurry of activity now absorbed students as they assembled costumes, located music, and designed sets for their on-stage performances. Production meetings and advice-seeking consumed most of the second linked class period while dress rehearsal for the upcoming evening extravaganza occupied students' attention at the third and last linked session.

Advertising the event campus wide, students presented their 20-25 minute plays before what we considered to be a packed audience, about 50 students, faculty, and administrators, on a rainy December evening during the last week of classes. As an example of just one excellent performance, six students acted out three scenes about the proposal, marriage, and everyday life of an intercultural couple. In the first scene, Scott, an American working in Japan, spoke of his return to the United States with his best friend, Masahiro. The dilemma confronting him was: what do I do about my Japanese girlfriend, Mari? While he struggled with the downside of uprooting her from her native Japan, he had already made a decision; he was going to propose to her that very evening. Mari's best friend, Rie, joined them in this conversation as they awaited Mari's arrival. With the departure of Masahiro and Rie, Scott,

fumbling for the right words, made a stereotypical American proposal, on his knees, offering Mari an engagement ring and his everlasting love.

In scene two, Scott and Mari were blissfully wed in a secular American style wedding ceremony with music, gowns, attendants, marital vows, and the wedding processional. To the regret, but laughter of the audience, the "kiss" by the bride and groom took place behind a censor sign. After one thwarted attempt, the bride succeeded in throwing her bouquet to a male in the audience, which, as one might imagine, "brought down the house."

In the third and final scene, the actors and actresses thoughtfully depicted some of the challenges facing a married intercultural couple. They lightheartedly dealt with the matter of food when Scott, in an uncharacteristic outburst, exclaimed that he could no longer stomach the same Japanese dinner over and over again. Thankfully, Scott's mother, Sarah, unexpectedly arrived to avert a heated argument. Trying to be culturally sensitive, she asked Scott how to greet Mari in Japanese, but then proceeded to hug her, making Mari very uncomfortable. Sensing some tension, Sarah learned of Mari's distress over her inability to prepare American style food. Graciously, Sarah offered to teach Mari American cooking if Mari reciprocated by giving Sarah lessons on Japanese cuisine. With harmony reestablished, Mari took advantage of the calm to tell Scott and Sarah about her pregnancy. Overjoyed, Scott embraced Mari as she explained that, similar to American custom, her parents would pay a visit to help out mother and baby. The scene ended with Scott telling Mari to call her parents with the wonderful news.

Without exaggeration, all seven groups produced top-notch performances. Their efforts were warmly received by an appreciative audience who offered an enthusiastic ovation for their work. With show time winding down, students gathered at a cast party afterwards to eat pizza and celebrate their success. With the final project script and bibliography submitted three days later, a demanding, but rewarding educational exercise in intercultural collaborative learning drew to a close.

Linked Activities Evaluation

We routinely solicited feedback from students and one another to better evaluate and modify our curriculum and integrated lesson plans. After each short-term linked activity, we, the sociologist and Applied English professor, requested written commentary from the Japanese students which, for the most part, revealed their enthusiasm and excitement about the cross-cultural opportunities afforded them. When surveyed at the end of the semester, the majority of Japanese students and American students liked or strongly liked the linked activities with one notable exception: the intercultural card game (Table 3). Mainly, students reported that we did not give them ample time or adequate explanation about the rationale and rules of the game. Therefore, they were puzzled about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

The remaining activities received far more positive feedback for various reasons. Particularly, the intercultural marriage panel and the sempai-kohai panel (especially for Americans) piqued students' interest in cultural practices with which they may have been largely unfamiliar (Table 3). The viewing of and discussion following the elementary education video was also favorably evaluated, since they could talk about themselves and their own experiences, compare divergent systems of education, and discover alternative styles of learning. In truth, the long-term linked project required more constant vigilance and monitoring. Therefore, we put in place an ongoing system of assessment which we now describe.

Student Evaluation

Our interim evaluation of long-term linked projects began two weeks after the initial formation of groups when we asked Japanese students and American students to furnish written responses to our open-ended questions: how is your group working out? What has worked well and what has not been going well? Among the 21 Japanese students, having good discussions, recognizing the need for more meetings, holding these meetings, divvying up task assignments among group members, and anticipating an interesting, challenging, and fun project were the most commonly cited answers (Table 4). While the 21 American

students made similar remarks, they also mentioned that the Japanese students' had difficulties in expressing their ideas and that they had attempted to include them in group conversations (Table 4).

Two weeks later, replying to the same questions, Japanese students noted the progress made on script development with some of them calling attention to their good group discussions while others reported on the problems associated with scheduling and attending project meetings. Overwhelmingly, American students characterized group interaction positively stating that script development received the highest priority now that most background research had been finished. They too raised concerns about meeting scheduling and attendance (Table 4).

As Japanese students progressed on their basic script outline, we queried them about how we could help beyond what we had done in terms of handouts, verbal instructions, and in-class activities. They indicated: listen to our ideas and give us feedback (33%) or nothing in particular, because you have already offered your advice (43%). Responding to their former concern, the sociologist added a class session to go over script ideas with each group while the Applied English professor scheduled group conferences to review written drafts.

When polled at the end of the semester, most Japanese students and American students liked or strongly liked the long-term linked project and gave almost unanimous support for its continuation (Table 3). As shown in Table 5, they valued the opportunity to join together in a fun and enjoyable activity with others from another culture to increase their understanding of dating and weddings. As for improvements, Japanese students recommended more class contact and further explication of the project rationale. Along with the need for more time, American students proposed additional cross-cultural training and a wider range of project topics from which to choose.

From the student perspective, this long-term linked activity went incredibly well. It allowed them to forge close bonds with five peers as they worked across cultures putting faith in their abilities to listen and discuss. While certain problems did surface, such as difficulties in expressing ideas and in attending meetings, students seemed remarkably open

and amenable to seeking solutions to whatever cultural and language hurdles they sometimes encountered.

Faculty and Cultural Liaison/Tutor Evaluation

Our evaluation of Track 1 and Track 2 linked activities took place during monthly debriefing meetings along with shorter conversational exchanges after the seven class periods when we met together. To be honest, the tutor, our cultural liaison, was our window into how students perceived and reacted to our planned curriculum. During our linked sessions, she circulated among student groups, as did we, to answer questions, iron out language and cultural misunderstandings, and offer her advice. Moreover, she attended every American Society class and held regular tutoring hours two times per week. Establishing a close relationship with Japanese students and American students, she elicited their trust, thereby enabling them to more honestly communicate with her about persistent problems. Unencumbered by the power inequities inherent in the student-professor relationship, she had the best read on what was happening.

Based on her input, our own observations, and students' verbal feedback (that did not necessarily appear in their written status reports), we uncovered some "unhealthy" interaction dynamics among two of the seven groups. Oddly enough, difficulties, in one group, stemmed not from cultural or language misunderstandings, but from a personality clash between two American students who could not reach agreement on any aspect of their long-termed project and whose apparent inability to compromise threatened to splinter the group. Averse to participating in this conflict, Japanese students took to the sidelines and watched. Our attempts at diplomatic intervention eventually resulted in an uneasy truce between the two individuals involved. Nonetheless, acrimonious feelings remained until the final performance when one of them admitted: "Because even though hating the project throughout its creation, watching the plays and the energy of all those involved at the end was so surprising and so satisfying that all that bitterness transformed into joy and appreciation for having worked as we did."

In the second instance, the group found themselves hampered by a self-assured American student who wanted it her way, since she had extensively researched their topic, interracial marriage, and knew the most about it. Unfortunately, she possessed many common misconceptions that the sociologist tried to tactfully counter by recommending movies and other relevant resources that would call into question her firmly entrenched beliefs. Additionally, we coached the Japanese students in this group to take advantage of the script outline as a way to interject their ideas. While she never really changed, students managed to proceed despite her.

In contrast, interactions between members of the other five groups proceeded relatively smoothly. Of course, they had their fair share of stumbling blocks, but their willing and flexible attitude to resolve their disagreements resulted in a generally positive experience. Moreover, their indefatigable dedication and genuine interest in each other provided the extra incentive to reach consensus. In many ways, they epitomized our vision of learning communities, composed of caring, motivated students, who respectfully came together in the spirit of intercultural cooperation for academic and social gains.

As for ourselves, we professionally benefited from the planning and execution of this linked curriculum. We thrived on the excitement generated by testing different pedagogical styles and working as a team. Moreover, we found it gratifying to be in an environment that stretched us beyond our own cultural boundaries toward heightened intercultural competence. Equally as important was the renewed enthusiasm for teaching and learning that we derived from this experience. We found ourselves reinvigorated and even more deeply committed to intercultural education based on its transformative potential for faculty and students.

Conclusion

Although encouraged by the success of this collaboration, we fully realize the need for further improvement. Taking into consideration student feedback, we could search for other means of intercultural training or make sure that we sufficiently explain the rationale and rules for the existing game. As for other short-term linked activities, they could be retained or scaled back to reallocate the time to the long-term project, thereby satisfying students' needs

to: clarify expectations, seek advice from faculty and the cultural liaison/tutor, and solve some of the attendance problems occurring with out-of-class meetings. Whatever tradeoffs we decide to make, we have passed the pilot stage and must now institute more systematic measures for assessing content and language learning outcomes. Without such important yardsticks in place, we cannot make any claims that we have achieved our original learning objectives.

As an "experiment" in intercultural collaborative learning, we believe that we developed a valuable pedagogical model that led to a progressive change in students' attitudes and a mounting curiosity in and readiness to learn about dating, weddings, and elementary education in another country. Moreover, as topical knowledge expanded, their abilities to understand and interpret customs, traditions, and events from another cultural perspective and relate it to their own correspondingly grew. Communicating in English, they applied their newfound knowledge and skills to researching, scripting, and performing a play of their own creation. In the end, through this structured, but fluid, process of intercultural learning, students and faculty moved closer to acquiring some of qualities central to Byram's (1997) conception of intercultural competence.

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Table 1 English Language Exercises for Short-Term Linked Activities Used by Applied English Professor in Her Class Sessions with Japanese Students

LINKED ACTIVITY	PRE-LINKED ACTIVITY LANGUAGE EXERCISES	POST-LINKED ACTIVITY LANGUAGE EXERCISES
Intercultural card game	Listened to the Applied English professor explain in English the basic rules and format of the game before meeting the American students. Asked the Applied English professor questions about the unfamiliar vocabulary she used to describe the game.	Prepared a short written reaction paper in English analyzing the significance of intercultural group work.
Computer dating websites	Practiced verbal translation of information from Japanese websites into English.	Discussed in English similarities and differences between Japanese and American dating websites.
Intercultural marriage panel	Wrote a list of questions in English to ask panelists. Practiced saying each question in English before meeting the panelists.	Paired Japanese students to talk in English about the advantages and disadvantages of intercultural marriage. Changed partners three times to practice speaking in English and to listen to a variety of reactions to the panelists' comments. Verbally shared with the entire class the important ideas learned in the paired conversations.
Elementary school video	Rehearsed an oral explanation in English of their own Japanese elementary school experiences in anticipation of the questions they would be asked by their American peers.	Paired Japanese students to discuss in English their answers to questions formulated by the Applied English professor about the education video and subsequent exchanges with their American peers. Wrote their answers to these questions in English based on their earlier paired conversations.
Sempai-kohai panel	No preparation. Specially designed activity exclusively for American students.	No debriefing. Specially designed activity exclusively for American students.

Table 2 Steps Involved in Completing the Final Long-Term Linked Group Project and Examples of English Language Preparatory Exercises

PROJECT TASKS	ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXERCISES
Each pair found 5 references related to their project topic. This involved: • Preparing a bibliography. • Reading, watching, and interviewing identified references. • Meeting as a group to discuss what they had learned. • Deciding on a project focus. • Doing research to gather additional information on their project focus.	Applied English professor spent time: • Assisting students' search for literature in English relevant to their project topic. • Reviewing written instructions from the sociologist for compiling a bibliography. • Helping students edit drafts of their typed bibliographies. • Explaining unfamiliar vocabulary in the articles and books that students had located.
Regularly scheduled group meetings – once a week.	The Applied English professor received regular oral and written feedback about group work and offered remedies about communication problems as they arose.
Japanese students worked independently of American group members to come up with script ideas at regularly scheduled weekly meetings.	Applied English professor devoted time: • Reviewing written instructions from the sociologist about script development. • Facilitating students' conversation in English about their initial script ideas. • Designing a script template to record in English thoughts about characters, dialogue, setting, props, costumes, etc.
Japanese students shared their script ideas orally and in writing with their American group members.	Applied English professor took charge of: • Teaching students how to summarize their script ideas in English. • Aiding with the editing of written scripts. • Orally debriefing with students about intercultural difficulties that surfaced when discussing their ideas with American group members.
American group members authored a more fully developed script incorporating Japanese students' written ideas.	The Japanese professor offered assistance to the American students in crafting a script.
Final project preparation included: • Revising and rehearsing script • Preparing costumes, music, and sets.	At this stage, the Applied English professor mainly worked with students on pronunciation, voice projection, voice intonation, and memorizing their lines.
Performed project script.	No other language assistance provided.
Turned in final version of written script.	No other language assistance provided.

Table 3 Summary of Student Feedback about Short-Term and Long-Term Linked Activities

LINKED ACTIVITY[1]	JAPANESE STUDENTS LIKE/STRONGLY LIKE	AMERICAN STUDENTS LIKE/STRONGLY LIKE	JAPANESE STUDENTS DO ACTIVITY AGAIN	AMERICAN STUDENTS DO ACTIVITY AGAIN
Intercultural card game	31% (5 of 16)	40% (8 of 20)	47% (7 of 15)	47% (9 of 19)
Computer dating websites	79% (11 of 14)	75% (15 of 20)	79% (11 of 14)	95% (18 of 19)
Intercultural marriage panel	94% (15 of 16)	94% (16 of 17)	100% (16 of 16)	95% (18 of 19)
Elementary school video	94% (15 of 16)	90% (18 of 20)	94% (15 of 16)	95% (18 of 19)
Sempai-kohai panel	81% (13 of 16)	85% (17 of 20)	81% (13 of 16)	100% (19 of 19)
Dating/wedding group project	79% (11 of 14)	70% (14 of 20)	100% (16 of 16)	90% (18 of 20)

[1]Some students chose not to answer all questions about linked activities.

Table 4 Interim Status Reports on Long-Term Linked Dating/Wedding Group Project

COMMENT[1]	JAPANESE STUDENTS OCTOBER 15 (n=21)	AMERICAN STUDENTS OCTOBER 15 (n=21)	JAPANESE STUDENTS OCTOBER 31 (n=21)	AMERICAN STUDENTS OCTOBER 31 (n=21)
Good group discussions	67% (14)	33% (7)	33% (7)	90% (19)
More meetings to work out project details	29% (6)	5% (1)	14% (3)	
Meetings regularly scheduled	19% (4)	14% (3)	19% (4)	10% (2)
Problems scheduling and attending meetings		10% (2)	38% (8)	24% (5)
Tasks already divided	29% (6)	14% (3)	14% (3)	19% (4)
Work proceeding on script			38% (8)	38% (8)
Most research completed			14% (3)	29% (6)
Efforts made to include Japanese students in project discussions	10% (2)	24% (5)		5% (1)
Difficulties among Japanese students in expressing ideas		19% (4)	5% (1)	
Interesting, fun, challenging project	19% (4)	14% (3)	10% (2)	5% (1)
Other	14% (3)	14% (3)	24% (5)	14% (3)

[1]Percentages exceed 100%, because students could give multiple answers.

Table 5 Reasons Students Recommended Doing Long-Term Linked Dating/Wedding Group Project Again and Suggestions for Improvement

REASONS TO DO IT AGAIN[1]	JAPANESE STUDENTS (n=16)	AMERICAN STUDENTS (n=20)
Opportunity to talk, work, perform with students from another culture	56% (9)	55% (11)
Increase understanding of dating and weddings in another culture	25% (4)	30% (6)
Fun, enjoyable, interesting activity	50% (8)	20% (4)
Challenging		15% (3)
Other		10% (2)
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT[2]	JAPANESE STUDENTS (n=16)	AMERICAN STUDENTS (n=20)
More classes together	31% (5)	
More time to complete all parts of the project	6% (1)	15% (3)
More cross-cultural training before forming groups		20% (6)
More explanation of project rationale	12% (2)	
Wider range of topics than just dating and weddings		10% (2)
Other	12% (2)	

[1]Percentages exceed 100%, because students could give multiple answers.

[2]Not everyone who completed the survey offered suggestions for improvement, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

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Rethinking Validity of the L2 Proficiency Concept: Lessons for EIL

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Abstract

There might be considerable consensus on the models of "proficiency" among L2 education specialists but there is currently no empirically validated description. The more fundamental concept of "communicative competence" and an ongoing debate towards a more detailed analysis of communicative activities have overshadowed the concept of "proficiency." The concept seems to be understood and be a useful reference point in the discourse of L2 professionals until it is questioned and further explored. Defining "proficiency" is a more complex topic than is generally assumed. In this article, the author attempts to explore the validity of the concept of 'proficiency' in L2 education and indicate some aspects useful for careful consideration when constructing the "EIL competence" framework.

Keywords

Proficiency; Communicative Competence; Proficiency Tests; Native Speaker; EIL

Introduction

In this article, I outline different angles for looking at the criticized concept of "proficiency" which might usefully be considered when debating the concept of English as an International Language competence. I begin with the impetuses which led me to write this paper; then I state the aims and discuss the evolution of the concept from the point of view of proficiency

tests and scales. Speculations on the native speaker concept bring us back to the concept of EIL competence. I conclude with a summary of my arguments for undermining the concept of proficiency and proposing ideas for consideration in the development of the concept of "EIL competence".

Justification

The first impetus which led me to write this paper is the myriad of intricacies around the concepts of "proficiency" and "competence". The concept of "proficiency" occupies a curious position: theoretically it is full of ambiguity and may be treated not as a single concept but as a combination of concepts. On the one hand, it is widely used; on the other hand, it is argued to be invalid in L2 education. Based on this ambiguous situation, I suggest that weaknesses be clarified and taken into account when constructing the concept of "EIL competence".

This thinking has brought me to consider "proficiency" within the situation in Kazakhstan. Mottos to achieve "proficiency" in Kazakh are common and L2 education is becoming one of the priorities in educational developments due to the contentious nature of language issues in the Kazakhstan context. Unfortunately, the term appears to be widely used but without attention being paid to its actual meaning. This has served as another impetus to consider the issues below. An overview of the public discourse has prompted me to conclude that there seems to be little understanding in regard to the general complexity of the concept. It is not a secret to state that there has not been a validated description of "proficiency" and/or "competence" yet.

A curious fact from the etymological perspective comes across at this point. This might also be the case in some other contexts. Due to the natures of Kazakh and Russian languages only one word is used interchangeably for "proficiency" and "competence," which adds to confusion in understanding the concept. The word "proficiency" simply does not exist and is given the same translation as the word "competence" and might not raise awareness of a possibility of two different concepts. One may feel confusion regarding the entire concept of "proficiency", proficiency-based teaching, and proficiency testing; for some the notions of

communicative competence and language proficiency are used interchangeably. Given these and similar circumstances, a desire among professionals and scholars to develop a unitary "proficiency" theory in clear categories with unambiguous relations is understandable. Such a framework would make pedagogical knowledge and educational activities more manageable but at present identifying proficiency/competence categories is problematic (North, 2000).

Finally, the growing global interest toward the EIL concept has prompted a revision of the "communicative competence" concept. Educationalists are now formulating procedures and priorities for EIL which will challenge native speakers and L2/FL speakers of English to learn how to communicate in cross-cultural settings (Richards, 2002). The most problematic aspect of defining EIL remains the notion of "competence" (Nunn, 2005). In the light of this complexity, a meaningful concept of generic "EIL competence" cannot exist. Therefore, careful analysis of every problematic aspect of the dilemma is requested. Nunn (ibid.) warns that there might be potential for neglecting "linguistic competence" in the field of EIL.

My belief is that before establishing the boundaries and categories for the concept of EIL and developing a proper "EIL competence" framework, educationalists should return to the origins of the "proficiency" concept which has been theoretically debated and empirically investigated for at least half a century. "Proficiency" and "competence" are different, at the same time related and merge into one another and can reflect the issues of interest and concern in relation to "EIL competence". Previous experiences cannot and should not simply go away and it would not be reasonable to disregard all valuable work to be applied in efficient research agenda to address the weaknesses and limitations that have already been identified.

This paper will pursue three aims: to increase awareness of the debatable issues on the concept of "proficiency", to attempt to undermine the concept and indicate some specific areas for consideration of the concept of "EIL competence". It is hoped that this work will address some issues of interest to our readers who may happen to be not only professionals but also students and parents. Some issues discussed might have been further elaborated and considered in more depth. For the present purpose, however, the paper will attempt to raise

some of the key issues that must be taken care of when discussing the concept of "EIL competence". Our concern in this paper is not to provide a final clear definition of "proficiency" but to underline specific angles for further investigation.

Problematic Sides of "Proficiency"

Over time theoretical linguists have made a number of attempts to construct frameworks of "proficiency/competence." Given the complexity of the issue, a general background on the views on "proficiency/competence" to see how they have changed over time and influenced L2 education is provided to contribute to the reader's understanding of the foundation for the debate.

One of the initial theoretical frameworks for linguistic competence is derived from the structuralist school of linguists who maintained the view that learning a second language involved mastering its elements or components (Fries, 1966). Early models distinguished listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and knowledge components, but did not clearly indicate whether skills manifested knowledge or whether they had different relations with knowledge components. L2 education at that time was based on the postulation that skills and knowledge components could be taught and tested separately.

The structural linguistic theory, along with behaviourist psychology theory, influenced L2 education producing the audio-lingual teaching method that assumed that speech was primary and each language was to be viewed within its own context as a unique system. In this view the speaker did not have to acquire knowledge 'about the language', although he/she could be capable of using it. According to Lado (1961), the approach which influenced L2 education development implied learning a new language was viewed as a sequence of activities leading to 'habit formation.' Audiolingualism focusing on the sequence of introducing the 'four skills' made this perspective popular in the 1960s. Nonetheless, Stern (1992) argues that the four skills; remain useful expressions of proficiency in modern L2 education.

Chomsky (1965) started the evolutionary process by postulating a fundamental distinction in his theory of transformational generative grammar. Hymes (1971) put

forward the concept of communicative competence to include not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic competence. (For instance, Campbell and Wales (1970) suggested that appropriacy of language is even more important than grammaticality). The two approaches have caused the major debate as to whether "communicative competence" included "grammatical competence" or not. Whilst early researchers paid more attention to the formal characteristics of language, Oller (1976, 1979) made an assumption that pragmatics was fundamental. He proposed one underlying factor – "global language proficiency" / "expectancy grammar," thus presenting "proficiency" as a unitary construct.

Communicative Language Teaching came to replace Audiolingualism and the Structural-Situational Approach. The 1980s saw a new stage when the discussion of "proficiency" reflected more communicative terms. The emergence of the constructs of "communicative competence" and "proficiency," led to major shifts in conceptions of syllabuses and methodology, the effects of which continue to be seen today. Another set of concepts, psychological or behavioural, viewed "proficiency" as "competence" and determined it in intralingual and crosslingual terms. Savignon (1972) admitted the need for communicative functions. Cummins (1980; 2000) made a distinction between two components of "proficiency": "basic interpersonal and communicative skills" ("BICS") and "cognitive/academic language ability" ("CALP").

I would like to consider in more detail the concept proposed by Canale and Swain (1980). Whilst there has been a lot of discussion as to the nature of the concept, they are the first scholars to present an extended concept of language components to facilitate such issues important for L2 education as language testing and curriculum development. Turning our thoughts to the introduction of this framework, we observe that it does not exemplify a perfect view of "proficiency," as attempts to prove this framework empirically failed. However, it has opened a new era through the introduction of new components of "communicative competence" and extended language testing theory and facilitated test development by giving attention to communicative testing. This framework, later refined by Canale in 1983, distinguished four principal types of "competence": "grammatical" (emphasis on language code), "sociolinguistic" (emphasis on appropriate use and

understanding of language in different sociolinguistic contexts / appropriateness of both meanings and forms), “discourse” (emphasis on combination and interpretation of meanings and forms as well as the use of cohesion devices to relate forms and coherence rules to organize meanings), and “strategic” (emphasis on verbal and nonverbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication).

Canale and Swain abstractly interpret “proficiency” as “communicative competence” and include “linguistic competence” within “communicative competence” to point out their indivisibility by putting forward an argument that grammar rules do not have meaning without rules of use. In their view, the grammatical component is as important as the sociolinguistic. Indeed, they view “grammatical competence” as knowledge of the rules of grammar and “sociolinguistic competence” as the knowledge of the rules of language use. A distinction is made between knowledge of use (“communicative competence”) and a demonstration of this knowledge (“performance”). “Performance” in their view is regarded as the realization of “competencies” and their interaction in the production and understanding of utterances. It can be assumed from the framework that “communicative competence” can be observed indirectly in actual “communicative performance.”

Bachman and Palmer (1982) also argue that language is not a simple enough a phenomenon to be described by only one general factor. They empirically support “linguistic,” “pragmatic” and “sociolinguistic competences” as the components of so-called “communicative proficiency.” Bachman and Palmer suggest that a model should include both a general factor and one or more specific factors to provide a better description for the concept of ‘proficiency’. Taking empirical evidence as a foundation, Bachman (1990a and 1990b) describes “proficiency” in terms of competence in a redefined way, suggesting organizational competence that includes morphology, syntax, vocabulary, cohesion, and organization and “pragmatic competence,” that includes Bachman and Palmer’s “sociolinguistic competence” and abilities related to the functions that are performed through language use.

The world has witnessed theories which sparked both proficiency-oriented teaching and teaching for “communicative competence.” The “proficiency” concept was said to guide

teachers in regard to course objectives and course content and help determine outcomes. How to "prepare students for advanced and competent use of a foreign language both within and outside an academic setting" was one of the predominant themes in language teaching (Freed, 1989, p. 57). Now professional teachers have started to express concern about various aspects of proficiency standards, proficiency-based teaching, proficiency tests, and proficiency texts. For instance, sharp criticism focused on the US oral proficiency interview and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and emphasized their being too teacher- and test-bound, lack of validity, inappropriate emphasis on grammatical accuracy, narrowly conceived views of communicative language use and failure to acknowledge adequately the underlying notion of "communicative competence." These problems have been acknowledged due to a lack of a unitary theory.

Whilst the natures of "proficiency" and "competence" are complex, theorists see "proficiency/competence" in various views and arrive at different frameworks undermining the concepts. The step toward solving the problem would be to define the terms stemming from a plethora of viewpoints and raising a myriad of questions. Is "proficiency" the same as mastery of a specific language? Knowledge? The four skills? Is it simply "competence" which can help students to develop functionally useful foreign language skills? Is "proficiency" the same as "competence"? What constitutes both? The terminology for describing these notions has not, of course, always been the same.

It would be easier to propose a term "communicative language proficiency" to provide a more comprehensive definition of language use, but the relationship between "competence" and "proficiency" is a complex subject related to the distinction between theoretical and operational models (North, 2000). On the one hand, "proficiency" may also be considered a part of "competence"; on the other, it may serve as an umbrella term. Vollmer (1981) points out that the term "proficiency" tends to stress the competence or performance aspects. Although "proficiency" is commonly associated with knowledge, Ingram (1985) puts forward that "proficiency" is more than knowledge – rather the ability to apply it in specific communication contexts. Taylor (1988) suggests the term "communicative proficiency" and sees "proficiency" as "the ability to make use of

competence" and "performance" as "what is done when proficiency is put to use." Davies (1989) points out that it is shapeless and defines "proficiency" as a part of communicative competence, along with innate ability and performance. Kasper (1997, p.345) points out, "in applied linguistics, models of communicative competence serve as goal specifications" in L2 education. The most applicable general approach would be expressing "proficiency" as "communicative competence." But in this case the goal is a comprehensive but unspecified command of L2 (Stern, 1992). A part of the problem is in the construct of communicative competence itself as theories have not yet provided a theoretical basis for a satisfactory description of the components of "proficiency" or their boundaries but it has been believed that a formalized theory of communicative competence should eliminate the concept of "proficiency." In any case, a satisfactory validated clear theory would serve as a foundational background for efforts to construct EIL competence but at the time being a diverse foundation complicates the work of EIL theorists.

Proficiency Tests and Scales

Although there might be considerable consensus on the models of "proficiency' among L2 education specialists, there is currently no empirically validated description. Stern (1983) maintains that a concept of "L2 proficiency" has had several interpretations but has not achieved a satisfactory outcome. In the same vein, Lantolf and Frawley (1988) point out a lack of even approaching a clear reasonable and unified theory.

As it has been outlined, Canale and Swain have played an important role in developments in L2 education by stressing the relevance of "communicative competence" to both L2 teaching and testing as they developed their framework when they faced the issue of language test development. With regard to testing, we infer that communicative testing deals not only with knowledge and ways of using this knowledge, but the demonstration of this knowledge in performance. It is clear that a theory of "communicative competence" is required to approach the challenge of language proficiency testing. The theory of "communicative competence" is a theory of "knowledge" and "proficiency," as outlined by Spolsky (1989). In his view, a test should make it possible to

describe “proficiency” “as the ability to perform some defined tasks that use language.” But such a test would have limitations concerning “the ultimate possibility of a direct translation from functional to structural terms.” Spolsky noted that, “the problem of determining which of the many functions which language fulfils should be included in a test of language proficiency.”

Literature reviews show that most current texts focus on proficiency tests rather than on the concept of “proficiency’” in general. “Proficiency” as a term appears in the most famous renowned language examination – the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English. Proficiency tests are an important field for L2 education: as we teach we think about measuring the progress of our students and monitoring their success but the description of “proficiency” has been dominated by a psychometric principle although it is questionable whether “proficiency” can be scaled.

We arrive at the most important theoretical issue in proficiency testing. According to Bachman (1990a), if tests are to have value and importance in L2 education, they should be valid, reliable and practicable. Lantolf and Frawley (1988) argue that “proficiency” will be valid as a concept when it becomes independent of psychometrics, and saliently remark that the theory must be proven and consistent with empirical research. How valid are the scores in determining one’s proficiency? Learners demonstrate various performances on different tasks they are asked to perform. From my personal teaching experience, I have found that one may demonstrate a high performance outcome on one task whilst failing a task of a different nature. At this point a question arises whether one, according to various degrees of performance, has different proficiencies or a single proficiency which is used to varying degrees, subject to a number of factors such as familiarity with similar tasks, the topic, the complexity of the task, time limitations, etc. (North 2000). It is difficult to judge which view should be used – performance- related or competence-related.

The lack of theoretical consensus on what it means to know a language and what language components should be tested and assessed have caused problems in the development of tests which partially cover what constitutes “proficiency” (Stern, 1983). Here we regard knowledge or skill; implicit or explicit knowledge of discrete items or of

larger linguistics units; any selected functional skills, whether academic or communicative, receptive or productive. Current reality displays that academic skills may be tested but proficiency tests are not able to assess communicative or creative components. Due to dependence of tests on theoretical frameworks, there is some danger of making inappropriate estimates of students' language abilities that may serve as potential threat to L2 education. The validity and reliability of tests based on an EIL competence framework must be addressed.

Existing proficiency testing methods are a concern for L2 education and will become a concern for EIL education. The problem is obvious: testing is associated with exactitude and outcomes are only represented by figures, which is inappropriate for communicative testing. Tests have face validity but do not provide proper feedback for instruction and learning because of difficulties in the interpretation of scores. A score may be interpreted as a learner's proficiency level relative to others, and it may predict future achievement but may not guarantee it. We surely have come across students who have reached high levels on tests but are still unable to use language in academic or even communicative situations.

Frameworks for tests should be validated but as North (2000) argues, the attempt to validate any framework will be obstructed by problems of isolating and operationalising the desired construct in test items and dangers of the data reflecting characteristics of a particular learner population. What is measured through taking into consideration generally accepted views on the nature of 'proficiency' should be made clear. Instead of asking whether the test is valid, we should ponder the utility of such a test, which brings us back to the faults of proficiency tests. Some teachers demonstrate a negative view of tests and favourable attitudes toward various exams. However, this might not be true in all cases. Shohamy (1992) outlines benefits of testing: achievement and proficiency assessment multi-dimensional diagnostic information; teaching and learning connections; norm-referenced and criterion-referenced information, etc. Bachman (1990a) justifies tests for their most prevalent use of language tests is for purposes of evaluation in educational programmes. Certification is crucial for various purposes such as placement in overseas universities, employment of better qualified staff, etc. But again we arrive at the question of

how assessment for certification can be carried out as we still must assess “proficiency.” What do we need to measure? The concern of certification must be carefully considered from a theoretical point of view and mutual understanding must be sought.

Problems related to the development of proficiency tests are in turn, related to the development of proficiency scales. Various scales of proficiency may serve as rating scales, examination levels, or stages of attainment. They are outcome oriented in terms of what and to what degree learners can perform and thus are behaviour oriented. Since proficiency scales concentrate on behaviour, they tend toward a functional view of proficiency and, therefore, should be effective. Brindley (1998) argues that some proficiency tests and scales seem to have acquired popular validation due to their longevity. If we try to understand the essence of scales we realize that what happened is that test grades were assigned descriptors and levels. Attempts to find out how descriptors were developed may be a complicated issue. Some descriptors were developed for use in certain specific contexts but other scales ‘borrowed’ the descriptors for adaptation to different contexts. Each set of scales of proficiency is based on a different theoretical view on “proficiency.” North (2000) points out that ‘it is intended to give meaning to numbers at a very general level, primarily to help students orient their learning. A purely numerical scale like the TOEFL scale can mean a lot to insiders, but does not say much to someone unfamiliar with the test. Scales of proficiency provide us with levels of attainment in L2 education and people may interpret them, but in reality the descriptions provided may not be valid because what happens is that descriptions of levels represent an inevitable and possibly misleading oversimplification of the language learning process.

We may extend the list of problems related to proficiency scales but would still have to admit that if “proficiency” were a unitary concept, proficiency scales would influence L2 education positively in terms of direction and organization of language learning. The considerations of the “EIL competence” framework should not exclude the possibility that properly established scales may have positive influences on professionals in terms of producing curricula and textbooks and applying methods and strategies appropriate for various language levels of learners.

Native Speaker Concept

The discussion of "proficiency" will not be complete without consideration of native speaker "proficiency" which is seen as the ultimate comparison point in L2 teaching, development of proficiency tests, and construction of proficiency scales. Although this notion is not the primary focus of this work, a review of angles will be provided for casting the validity of this criterion into doubt. Lee (2005) employs a wide range of arguments for evaluating appropriacy of the native speaker model in L2 education. In Kazakhstan students, parents and even some teachers believe and do not doubt the native speaker as an ideal standard and a reference point; thus questioning linguistic potential of local teachers. Theoretically, the notion of the native speaker could have clarified the views on "proficiency" but literature reviews indicate that this concept is dubious. Some may argue that it is a unitary concept; however, Lee (2005) encourages the quest for a better understanding which has been critically discussed in recent times.

To put the idea simply, I will ask a few questions. Is one proficient because one can be compared to a native speaker, or, because native speakers think of themselves as being proficient? A reference or comparison is usually made to the notion of the native speaker of English due to the increasing popularity of L2 English teaching and learning. According to our everyday experience, one of the aims of L2 learners is to be able to communicate with native speakers of their L2. Native speakers are the people with whom L2 learners can practice their language skills in a variety of settings and situations. Classroom practice demonstrates that with regard to language proficiency learners try to match themselves, teachers and others against mysterious native speakers.

Numerous scholars have made recent attempts to explore and define this popular notion in L2 education. A review of literature (e.g. Coulmas, 1981; Davies, 1991, 2003; Medgyes, 1992; Phillipson, 1996; Ramptom 1990; McArthur, 1992; Maum, 2002) outlines such criteria for a native speaker as early childhood language acquisition, its maintenance, intuitive knowledge of the language, abilities for fluent, spontaneous discourse, creative use of the language, abilities to communicate within different social settings, accent, etc.

Tests claim to use native speakers as the standard of measure, but some native speakers do not demonstrate linguistic and cognitive patterns attributed to the ideal level that L2 learners strive to attain. The ACTFL scale, for example, adopted the notion of the 'educated native speaker' from its origins in the government oral proficiency interview. The 1980s noted "a special place to the native speaker as the only true and reliable source of language data" (Ferguson 1983: vii). This is not always true and we can doubt the concept of the native speaker because native speakers vary from each other in their command of different aspects of language.

Nayar (1994, p.4) argues that native speakers are not "ipso facto knowledgeable, correct and infallible in their competence." Judging from our own L1 experience, we can say that various factors such as age, education, social class, dialect, etc. can disqualify the native speaker as being the best point of reference. A specific study (Hamilton et. al., 1993) conducted research, which tested groups of people by means of the IELTS assessment battery, and discovered important differences between the performances of even well-educated native speakers. Hamilton found that variability was due to the level of education and work experience and concluded that native speakers should not be taken as a criterion.

International schools recruit native teachers of EFL/ESL are recruited from all over the world. The concern stems from the discussion of the development of "English" and "Englishes" (Nunn, 2005). This issue in fact goes beyond L2 education boundaries as attempts to establish ideal English to some specific area in the world may even raise political issues, especially in the context of the changing international status of English. Students and local teachers might wonder whether a British teacher should be considered the ideal standard? What about an American, an Australian, a Canadian, or a New Zealander? What about such English-speaking countries as India which absorbed the language due to historic reasons. An ongoing debate in Kazakhstan establishes a specific dichotomy of British English and American English. But the following argument is worth considering: American English is different from British English; therefore, other "Englishes" should be considered different but not inferior (Singh, 1998).

The theoretical debate about native speakers may be unresolved, but in the daily practice of language teaching and testing resolution is necessary and agreement on a model and a goal required. The global expansion of English has been widely discussed (e.g. Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1999). Graddol (p. 68) challenges language educationalists: 'large numbers of people will learn English as a foreign language in the 21st century and they will need teachers, dictionaries and grammar books. But will they continue to look towards the native speaker for authoritative norms of usage?'

We can doubt the concept of the native speaker for many reasons but the simple way of expressing this would be to say that native speaker proficiency is not homogeneous and cannot be considered a perfect criterion and reference point in L2 education. The notion used as a reference point to the concept of proficiency is dubious and difficult to define and might have already become a label which needs revision and reevaluation. The implication here is that the time has come to negotiate clear formulations of the concept as it is also important for the future of "proficiency" as a concept. At the time being the native speaker concept remains ambiguous and the issue of theoretical description of "native speaker proficiency" is open to question.

Conclusions for EIL

The search for solving the dilemma of native-non-native speakers bring us to the EIL concept. What can we learn from the history of "proficiency" debates? What are the lessons for us in regard to EIL competence? The debate has shown that various viewpoints and separated efforts have undermined the concept of proficiency and, moreover, caused criticized approaches to L2 teaching and testing. EIL research should foresee issues which can represent dangers to the validity of the concept, the pragmatics of the development of tests and the application of language scales. Inappropriate decisions with regard to language testing, curricula and materials development will not simply undermine the concept but disadvantage learners. Taking into account the difficulties with the concept of proficiency, a warning is for the "world" of theoretical linguists, the "world" of tests developers and the "world" of teaching practitioners to unite their efforts.

A worrying point comes from the fact that a body of research on English as an International Language is growing, yet it has already indicated the widespread inconsistency in terms and differences in terminology, which recalls a never-finishing debate discussed above. Seidlhofer (2004) points out that in addition to the plural terms "Englishes" (Kachru, 1992) and the term "World Englishes" (Crystal, 1997), confusion is caused by "English as an International Language" (e.g. Modiano, 1999a, 1999b; Jenkins, 2000, 2002), English as a Lingua Franca (e.g. Gnutzmann, 2000), English as a global language (e.g. Crystal, 1997; Gnutzmann, 1999), English as a World Language (e.g. Mair, 2003) and English as a Medium for Intercultural Communication (e.g. Meierkord, 1996).

The panacea represented by the concept of English may also cause drawbacks. Each proposed concept bears advantages and disadvantages. A range of approaches such as "the traditional foreigner"; "the revisionist foreigner"; "the other native" as well as "English as a Lingua Franca," "International English" / "English as an International Language" (e.g. Davies 1989; Kachru 1985; Medgyes, 1999; Mohanan 1998; Paikeday, 1985; Seidlhofer, 2000; Singh, 1998; Smith 1983) has suggested a way out from the sensitive and complicated situation with the native speaker concept, including issues beyond the scope of linguistics and language teaching. Although the movement has started recently, there has not been a consensus as to which approach offers the best solution. It has been argued that some proposed approaches suggest similar core ideas, whilst others stipulate contradictions (e.g. Kachru, 1985, Smith (1983), Davies (1989). Problems concern the order of language acquisition of considered languages (L1; L2; L1 and L2; FL, etc.), "Circles" of language use (Kachru, 1992), language status in the country, etc. For instance, the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) concept is a remedy which does not differentiate between L1 and L2 speakers (Seidlhofer, 2000 and 2004).

The confusing point in regard to "EIL competence" is whether we are contemplating "EIL proficiency" or "EIL competence." Is the "competence" we are talking of viewed from the perspectives of L1 or L2? The understanding of "proficiency" becomes more complicated as not only L2 competence is variable but also "native competence." The concept of "proficiency" could have provided a valuable basis; however, due to its ambiguity and lack

of agreement among theorists, questions are raised with regard to “EIL competence.” How will interrelationships among the components be addressed? The issue is not only to identify components but also find how competencies interact and are acquired. Will “basic interpersonal and communicative skills” and “cognitive/academic language ability” be accounted for? Will the practical use and ability for use be considered? The idea is not only to identify a theoretical framework to illustrate what components “communicative competence” may include without establishing a model to show how competencies interact and become acquired. Is “linguistic competence” viewed within “communicative competence” to point out their indivisibility? What is the view for grammar rules without rules of use? Is the grammatical component as important as the sociolinguistic? As it has been noted, efforts of theorists and test developers should be united to arrive at a sound framework. But whilst aiming at a theory, one should not forget about assessment methodologies and testing issues.

The routes are numerous but my point of view is that the above discussed concepts and research they engendered may provide tremendously valuable assistance for articulating “EIL competence” problems and suggesting possible solutions. The development of the EIL concept requires strong research considering already learnt lessons to provide a better sound construct for “EIL competence.” This leaves abundant space for research and contemplations for further discussion. I hope that the article has been able to indicate the most appealing to further stimulate the Asian EFL discussion in order to outline the entire set of issues for further consideration.

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A Survey on the Relationship between English Language Proficiency and the Academic Achievement of Iranian EFL Students

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Abstract

One of the most serious problems that Iranian EFL students face in their field of study is their inability to communicate and handle English after graduating from university. This is due to their weaknesses in general English, which influence their academic success. The intent of the present study was to examine the strength of the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. Accordingly, the relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement was examined in this study, and a significant connection was found between proficiency and grade point averages of academic achievement. Similarly, the results revealed significant correlation between English language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subjects.

Key Words: Language proficiency, General English, EFL Writing and speaking

Introduction

Many students who are majoring in English language in Iran have chosen their field of study with little degree of capability in language use and its components, in other words, they have low ability or proficiency in English language use and usage when they begin to study. The term "capability" can refer to the ability of the examinee to recognize, comprehend, or produce language elements, in other words, "… at a given point in time the language learner may be a listener, speaker or both" (Farhady *et al.*, 1994).

Having difficulties in grasping fully the contents and concepts of the course given in the target language seems to be one of the most serious problems that EFL students face in their particular course of study. This might be due to their weaknesses in general English, which may have a drastic impact on their academic success. Passing some courses successfully is not a determining yardstick in assessing students' overall language ability. Having passed some courses and having graduated, Iranian EFL students in general seem not to be as proficient and qualified in language use and components as might be expected (Farhady, *et al*., 1994). In other words, they fail to understand fully the context of language use – the contexts of discourse and situations. Savignon (1983) states that communication takes place in an infinite variety of situations and success in a particular role depends on one's understanding of the context and on the prior experience of a similar kind (pp. 8-9). Therefore, the overall performance of EFL students in language use depends on their English language proficiency. To determine whether this proficiency affects the academic achievement of the EFL students, we decided to conduct the present research. The intent of this study was to examine the strength of the relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.

In this connection, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Is there any relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students?
2. Does English language proficiency have a significant impact on achievement in English speaking subjects (lessons) of Iranian EFL students?

3. Does English language proficiency have a significant impact on achievement in English writing subjects (lessons) of Iranian EFL students?

On the basis of the above-mentioned research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement of Iranian EFL students.
2. English language proficiency does not have a significant impact on achievement in English speaking subjects (lessons).
3. English language proficiency does not have a significant impact on achievement in English writing subjects (lessons).

Review of Literature

According to Stern (1983), proficiency can be looked at as a goal and thus be defined in terms of objectives or standards. These can then serve as criteria by which to assess proficiency as an empirical fact, that is, the actual performance of given individual learners or groups of learners. He states that "proficiency ranges from zero to native - like proficiency. The zero is not absolute because the second language learner as speaker of at least one other language, his first language, knows language and how it functions. Complete competence is hardly ever reached by second language learners" (p.341). Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the language ability or ability in language use. Oller (1983) states that language proficiency is not a single unitary ability, but that it consists of several distinct but related constructs in addition to a general construct of language proficiency. Farhady, et al. (1983) state that the term 'proficiency' refers to the examinee's ability in a particular area of competency in order to determine the extent to which they can function in a real language use situation.

According to Best and Kahn (1989) achievement tests attempt to measure what an individual has learned. They are particularly helpful in determining individual or group status in academic learning. Achievement test scores are used in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses and as a basis for awarding prizes, scholarship, or degrees. They are used also

in evaluating the influences of courses of study, teachers, teaching methods, and other factors considered to be significant in educational practice. Graham (1987) pointed out the problems associated with research that attempts to delineate the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance, including the nature of the measures used to define L2 proficiency; the definition of academic success, especially when the reported GPA may be based on unequal numbers of courses or on dissimilar courses; and the possible influence of other variables in determining academic success.

Butler and Castellon-Wellington (2000) compared student content performance to concurrent performance on a language proficiency test. This study established a correlation relationship between English language proficiency and performance on standardized achievement tests in English. Ulibarri, et al. (1981) compared the performance of 1st, 3rd, and 5th-grade Hispanic students on three English language tests with their achievement data for reading and math; they found that the language test data were not very useful in predicting achievement in reading and math.

Stevens et al. (2000) investigated the relationship between the language and performance of seven-grade English language learners on two tests- a language proficiency test and a standardized achievement test. They stated that the correspondence between the languages of the two tests was limited. Bayliss and Raymond (2004) examined the link between academic success and second language proficiency in the context of two professional programs. They conducted two studies. First, they investigated the link between ESL scores on an advanced ESL test and the grade point average (GPA) obtained over two semesters. Second, they investigated the link between French second language scores on an advanced L2 test and both the number of courses failed and the first semester GPA. In recent years, researchers have examined the relationship between language proficiency and such various areas as intelligence, aptitude, and language skills. Garcia-Vasquez et al. (1997) compared the reading achievement scores of Hispanic middle and high school students with measures of their proficiency in English and found that the highest correlations were between English proficiency and English academic achievement ($r = 0.84$). Lower, significant correlations were observed between Spanish reading and English reading ($r = 0.24$), and no correlation

was found between Spanish proficiency and English academic achievement (r = 0.03). Ulibarri et al. (1981) demonstrated that English language proficiency is the best predictor of English reading achievement for students with lower levels of English proficiency, even when students are just beginning to read. De Avila (1990) observes that the relationship between academic achievement and language proficiency disappears as students approach native- like proficiency levels.

Methodology

Participants

EFL students majoring in English translation at the Islamic Azad University, Takestan campus, were randomly selected to participate in this study. The selection procedures yielded a sample of 50 students, all in the last semester of their course of study. Of the 50 participants, 80% were female and 20% were male.

Procedure

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study was to find out the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students. So, in order to achieve this goal, a standardized TOEFL paper test was first administered to the participating students, so as to decide their overall English language proficiency. The subtests included listening, reading comprehension, grammar and written expressions, and vocabulary. To test the speaking ability of the subjects, we also arranged an interview. The grading criteria for assessing the interview were pronunciation, style, vocabulary, grammar, suitability, fluency, and accuracy, to all of which equal points were assigned. Data on academic achievement was obtained from students' cumulative folders. After administrating the TOEFL paper test and conducting the interview, the results of different parts of the test and the interview were used in total as an indicator of each student's estimated English language proficiency score. Grade point averages (GPAs) included those specialized subjects, which were in the areas of language learning and teaching. The computed GPA was comprised of content areas such as linguistics, methodology, testing, English literature, phonology, and advanced writing which students had passed in

subsequent semesters. Then the coefficient of correlation between two sets of scores obtained from the students' GPAs and the results of language proficiency test was calculated.

To decide whether the calculated proficiency scores have a significant impact on the students' achievement in speaking and writing subjects, the authors computed two different GPAs for each student. The first GPA was comprised of oral contents, that is, those subjects that had been assessed orally such as oral reproduction of a story etc. The second GPA was restricted to the written language, that is, those subjects which had been evaluated in a written form.

Later, the correlation analysis was used to determine the relations between scores on language proficiency and achievement in speaking and writing subjects. This was done to demonstrate the impact of language proficiency on achievement in speaking and writing subjects respectively.

Results

The results of descriptive analysis of the data showed that the mean of the language proficiency score of participating students was 9.49, and the standard deviation was 1.62. This indicates that the language ability of almost all students was low. The mean of the English speaking and writing subjects (lessons) scores were 14.68 and 13.60 while the standard deviations were 1.72 and 2.14 respectively. This demonstrates that these EFL students performed much better on English speaking subjects than on English writing subjects (see Table 1).

The result of the correlation revealed a significant relation between English language proficiency and academic achievement (GPA). The correlation coefficient of the two sets of scores was 0.48. This suggests that as English proficiency increases, so does academic success. In other words, there is a positive correlation between the two variables.

Significant correlations were also observed between English proficiency and achievement in speaking and writing subjects. The results of the Pearson correlation revealed that the English language proficiency of Iranian EFL students correlates positively with achievement in speaking subjects (0.36) and achievement in writing subjects (0.40)

respectively (see Table 2). These findings indicate that proficiency in English influences achievement in English writing subjects of students more than achievement in English speaking subjects.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics of Data

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Tr Mean	St Dev	SE Mean
Language Proficiency	48	9.49	9.75	9.43	1.72	0.315
Speaking Subjects Score	48	14.684	14.675	14.588	1.728	0.249
Writing Subjects Score	48	13.608	13.745	13.595	2.141	0.309

Table 2 - Correlation Analysis

	Language proficiency
Academic achievement	0.48
Writing subjects	0.40
Speaking subjects	0.36

Discussion

The results of data analysis demonstrated that the first null-hypothesis of this study, which asserts, “there is no relationship between English language proficiency and the academic achievement" was rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a relationship between these two variables; in other words, the English language proficiency correlates positively with the academic success.

This study presents some evidence that success in completing university assessment tasks may be related to proficiency in English, especially for students studying English. Students with lower levels of proficiency in English had low academic performance. This suggests that there is a direct relationship between academic success and language proficiency. Researchers have long noted that there seems to be a correlation between first and second

language proficiency, and academic achievement in the first and second language. Feast (2002) found a significant and positive relationship between English language proficiency as measured by IELTS test scores, and performance at university as measured by Grade Point Average (GPA).

Although, it is logical to assume that English proficiency influences scores on academic achievement grade point average, the findings of this study revealed that the goals of educating language learners to be proficient have not been fulfilled. Stern (1992) states that proficiency goals include general competence, mastery of the four skills, or mastery of specific language behaviors. The low results of the administered TOEFL test indicated that the EFL students in undergraduate programs of Iranian universities are not sufficiently proficient and capable to act as English language experts. Their weak overall language ability affects drastically the academic success of the students in subsequent semesters. It seems that present general English courses have not been sufficient or successful in preparing students for their future careers. Graves (2001) points out that the tests that measure proficiency are also a part of needs assessment because they help determine what students already know and where they are lacking. Accordingly, we believe that the Iranian University Entrance Examinations for the admission of EFL students should be reviewed critically; otherwise, the academic achievement of the admitted EFL students may not meet the intended course goals.

The results of statistical analysis of data also showed that the second and third null-hypotheses of this study, which assert that "English language proficiency does not have any significant impact on achievement in English speaking and writing subjects, were rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between English language proficiency and achievement in English speaking and writing subjects. In other words, it should be asserted that, in the light of this finding, as English language proficiency increases, so doe’s performance of EFL students on English speaking and writing subjects.

Another important point which is worth highlighting is that language proficiency had greater impact on achievement in writing subjects than in speaking subjects. That is, those

with higher language proficiency had higher achievement scores in written language compared with spoken language. However, this does not undermine the significance of proficiency in relation to student's spoken language, as Farhady (1983) observed performance on language proficiency tests was closely related to students' educational background, major field of study, sex, and nationality. So, the students' performance and proficiency are related, even though a variety of parameters such as subjectivity of scoring, affective variables, physical conditions, and backwash effect of test produce varying scores.

Conclusion

In summary, English language proficiency is a good indicator and predictor of academic achievement for those students who are majoring in English (the EFL area), at least in the Iranian context. It is also representative of the performance of EFL students in written and spoken subjects respectively. In the Iranian case, EFL students with higher proficiency perform much better in writing subjects than speaking subjects. It seems that the deficiency is due to non-standardized university entrance screening tests that need to be corrected. Therefore, it is recommended that the selection process be appraised and changed carefully. This requires the attention of higher education authorities in Iran and elsewhere in order to choose more proficient candidates from the very beginning. Such a measure will have potential implications in all areas of academic development. Also, general English should be given special attention at university level not only for EFL students, but also for students majoring in other fields.

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Language Learning Style Preferences: A Students Case Study of Shiraz EFL Institutes

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the language learning style preferences of Iranian EFL learners, and the degree of teachers' awareness of them. To this end, 219 language learners (121 males and 98 females) from different levels of instruction and different ages (14-44), studying at two language institutes took part in the study. As a further step, 14 teachers working with the same students were called for cooperation. A 13-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Brindley (1984) was employed to elicit information for the study. The data obtained through the questionnaire were subjected to Chi-square tests in order to check the significance of the difference between the responses. Results showed the learning preferences of students in different areas. Results also indicated that teachers are aware of their students' learning preferences in some cases, but unaware in some others. Therefore, there needs to be a closer cooperation between teachers and students in some instances.

Key Words: Learning preferences, cooperative instruction

1. Introduction

In recent years with the shift from an instructional paradigm to a learner-oriented approach towards language learning/teaching, understanding the way people learn is of crucial importance and is the key to educational improvement. There is no doubt that students take in and comprehend information in different manners. Some like to see and others like to hear. Some prefer to learn individually, independent of others, while others enjoy interaction and relationship with their peers. It is widely believed (e.g. Reid, 1987; Celcc-Murcia, 2001) that the different ways of how a learner takes in and processes information are collectively referred to as learning styles or learning preferences. To achieve a desired learning outcome, teachers should provide teaching interventions and activities that are compatible with the ways through which learners like to learn the language or any other subject matter. When mismatches exist between learning styles of the learners in a class and the teaching style of the teacher, the students may become bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum, and themselves, and in some cases change to other curricula or drop out of school (Felder, 1996).

Most teachers are not aware of the ways their students prefer to learn the language, or even if they are, they pay little, if any, attention to them. Although most teachers believe that their students come to language classroom with different interests and preferences, they are still reluctant to consult learners in conducting language learning activities, hence being unable to meet the learning needs of individual students. Teachers, therefore, need to discover their students' preferred way of learning the language. This way they can teach in a way that is appealing to most students, if not all, and do what works best for them. Such information can also help material designers and syllabus planners to devise a language learning syllabus that is in line not with their own perceptions and experiences, but with what is most likely to meet with the students' approval. And as Spratt (1999) argues, often, those involved in syllabus, materials, and activity design predict what learners like or dislike on the basis of their own experience or by consulting the relevant literature. It has been proved that such an approach would have failed to capture many of the students' learning preferences, and how useful it is to consult learners and involve them in the teaching/learning design process. It is, therefore,

crucial to find out the ways through which students prefer to learn the language, hoping that such information can help teachers, in general, and Iranian EFL teachers, in particular, to be more effective in their career.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Categorization of learning styles

Reid (1995) divides learning styles into three major categories: *cognitive learning styles*, *sensory learning styles*, and *personality learning styles*.

Cognitive learning styles

***Field-independent vs. Field-dependent*:** Field-independent learners learn more effectively step by step, beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas. Field-dependent learners, in contrast, prefer to learn in context and holistically.

***Analytic vs. Global*:** Analytic learners learn individually, and prefer setting goals. Global learners, on the other hand, learn more effectively through concrete experience, and by interaction with other people.

***Reflective vs. Impulsive*:** Reflective learners learn more effectively when they have time to consider options before responding. This is while, impulsive learners are able to respond immediately and take risks.

Sensory learning styles

Perceptual learning styles

***Auditory learner*:** learns more effectively through the ear (hearing)

***Visual learner*:** learns more effectively through the eyes (seeing)

***Tactile learner*:** learns more effectively through touch (hands-on)

***Kinesthetic learner*:** learns more effectively through body experience (movement)

***Haptic learner*:** learns more effectively through touch and body involvement

Environmental learning styles

***Physical vs. Sociological*:** Physical learners learn more effectively when variables such as temperature, sound, light, food, time, and classroom arrangement are considered.

Sociological learners, in contrast, learn more effectively when variables such as group, individual, pair, and team work, and level of teacher authority are regarded.

Personality learning styles

Extroversion vs. Introversion: Extroverted learners are interested in concrete experience, contact with outside, and relationship with others. Introverted learners, on the other hand, are more interested in individual, independent situations.

Sensing vs. Perception: Sensing learners learn best from reports of observable facts and happenings, and rely on their five senses. This is while, perception learners learn more effectively from meaningful experiences and relationships with others.

***Thinking vs. Feeling*:** Thinking learners learn best from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences. On the other hand, feeling learners prefer personalized circumstances and social values.

***Judging vs. Perceiving*:** Judging learners learn by reflection, analysis, and processes that involve closure. Perceiving learners, in contrast, learn through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processed that postpone closure.

***Ambiguity-tolerant vs. Ambiguity-intolerant*:** Ambiguity-tolerant learners learn best when opportunities for experience and risk, as well as interaction, are present. Ambiguity-intolerant learners, however, learn most effectively when in less flexible, less risky, and more structured situations.

***Left-brained vs. Right-brained*:** Left-brained learners tend toward visual, analytic, reflective, self-reliant learning. Right-brained learners, on the contrary, are more interested in auditory, global, impulsive, interactive learning.

2.2. Learners' learning preferences

Over the past three decades researchers have started to work on the learning preferences. Research that identifies and measures perceptual learning styles relies primarily on self-reporting questionnaires by which students select their *preferred* learning styles. Reid

(1987), for example, based on the findings of a survey, distinguished four perceptual learning modalities:

1) Visual learning (for example, reading and studying charts)

2) Auditory learning (for example, listening to lectures or audiotapes)

3) Kinesthetic learning (involving physical responses)

4) Tactile learning (hands-on learning, as in building models)

Results of Reid's study showed that ESL students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Most groups showed a negative preference for group learning. Reid came to the conclusion that the learning style preferences of nonnative speakers often differ significantly from those of native speakers; that ESL students from different language backgrounds sometimes differ from one another in their learning style preferences; and that variables such as sex, length of time in the United States, length of time studying English in the U. S., field of study, level of education, TOEFL score, and age are related to differences in learning styles.

Wintergerst, DeCapua, and Marilyn (2003) tried to explore the learning style preferences of three different populations (Russian EFL students, Russian ESL students, and Asian ESL students). Findings revealed that these three groups of language learners clearly preferred group activity above individual work, with the Russian EFL and Asian ESL students favoring group work and project work. The researchers further suggested that at least some cultural influences were at play. Both quantitative and qualitative studies in cross-cultural settings support a relationship between culture and learning and contend that culture, ethnicity, class, and gender play important roles in shaping the learning preferences and learning styles of students (see Anderson, 1993).

In an attempt to investigate the issue of learners' preferences of the methodology of learning a foreign language, Kavaliauskiene (2003) drew three main conclusions from this research. First, slightly more than half of the learners favor a communicative approach to perfecting their language skills by working in pairs/small groups, taking part in projects and

practicing English by talking to their peers. Second, given assignments 93 percent of learners support the idea of homework against 7 percent who reject it. Third, a short-term approach to studying a foreign language prevails. Learners seek passing their exams and getting good marks, and are not concerned with improving language skills and competence for the future usage.

To conclude, it is very important to understand and explore each individual's learning style. Analyzing one's own particular learning style can be very helpful and beneficial to the student by aiding them in becoming more focused and an attentive learner, which ultimately will increase educational success. Discovering this learning style will allow the student to determine his or her own personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from them.

2.3. Comparing students' and teachers' opinions

Various studies have shown that there can be considerable discrepancies of opinion between learners and their teachers or syllabus experts. A divergence of opinion between these two groups has been noted in relation to what learners need, what they prefer, and the nature of language and language learning (Brindley, 1984).

The teachers in Barkhuisen's (1998) survey were frequently surprised to learn about the thoughts and feelings of their students. In other words, the students' perceptions did not match those of teachers. The implication of this piece of research is that if teachers are aware of where their learners are coming from, how they approach language learning, what they feel about their language learning experiences, and how they like to learn the language, they will be able to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom. Learners must be encouraged to express their learning preferences, both for themselves and teachers. Doing so would allow learners to consider why they are participating in certain activities, how these activities help them learn English, and what use they can make of them both for academic purposes and outside classrooms.

Spratt's (1999) study, too, showed a considerable lack of correspondence between the learners' preferences and teachers' perceptions of them. It was seen that teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences corresponded in approximately 50% of cases with learners' actual

preferences. It was also found that there is no obvious pattern to the correspondences or lack of them. This means that it is hard to discern reasons for why they occurred and hard too to predict where they might occur.

Finally, Stapa (2003) concluded that students' preferences do indeed correlate with those of teachers in many instances. The findings of his study reveal significant results suggesting a need for a closer cooperation between students and teachers as to how learning activities should be arranged and implemented in the classroom.

Along with all the studies stated above, the present study strived to investigate the learning styles preferred by the Iranian EFL learners. More importantly, it attempted to examine the extent to which teachers are aware of the students' learning preferences. This second issue has been worked upon by quite a few researchers in a number of settings. It has not, however, been duly delved into in the Iranian context, particularly in the context of language institutes which are home to myriads of language learners across the country. As a result, a detailed and comprehensive study of the learning preferences of Iranian EFL learners seemed to be of paramount necessity and importance. To this end the present study with the following goals and objectives was designed.

3. Objectives of the study

The present study intended to investigate the language learning preferences of the Iranian EFL students and the extent of teachers' awareness of them. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the learning style preferences of the Iranian EFL learners?
2. To what extent, if any, are teachers aware of their students' learning preferences?
3. How can these students be categorized in terms of learning styles typologies?

4. Method

4.1. Participants

Two hundred and nineteen language learners (121 males and 98 females) from different levels of instruction (Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced levels) and different ages

(14-44) took part in the study. Moreover, 14 teachers working with the same students were asked to express their views regarding the extent of their awareness of their students' learning preferences. The data were collected from 14 intact classes of two language institutes. The first institute was Shiraz University Language Center (SULC), and the second was Navid Language Institute.

4.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a 13-item language learning preference questionnaire adopted from Brindley (1984). It consisted of two versions: version 1 was designed for students and version 2 for teachers. In the students' version, the students were supposed to state how they prefer to learn the language. In the teachers' version, the teachers were asked to express their opinions as to how they feel their students prefer to learn the language (See the Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire). Since one of the objectives of the study was to examine the degree of agreement between teachers and students in terms of language learning preferences, this questionnaire was employed due to the fact that it has two versions, taking into account both teachers' and students' responses.

4.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis

The required data were collected in one session. The questionnaire was given to students during their class session. Instruction as to how to complete the questionnaire was given in Persian. At the same time and during the same session, the teachers were provided with the questionnaire (teachers' version) to complete.

The data obtained through the questionnaire were subjected to Chi-square tests in order to define the significance of the difference between the responses.

5. Results and Discussion

Results of some of the items in the questionnaire are presented in this section. Some of the responses received rendered significant results, while some others did not. This section will briefly present those responses which were statistically significant. However, it should be

noted that for the purpose of not making this paper lengthy and hence difficult to read, only some of the most prominent responses (that is, items 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13) are briefly discussed.

In item 2, students were asked to express whether they preferred working individually, in pairs, in small groups, or in a large group. Results are presented below:

Table 1: Learning Mode

Learning Individually	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	77	35.2	109.5	19.29	0.0001
No	142	64.8	109.5		
Total	219				

As shown, only 35.2% of students expressed their preference for working individually. This is while, 64.8% of the students preferred other modes of learning the language, such as learning in pairs or in groups.

It can be concluded from the results of this item that learners seem to favor a communicative approach to language learning by showing reluctance to working on their own. It seems they feel more comfortable, productive, and relaxed by working in other ways, e.g. in pairs, or in groups where their voices would be heard, and views listened to and valued.

In the teachers' version, teachers were asked whether their students liked working individually, in pairs, or in groups. The following table illustrates the pertaining results:

Table 2: Teachers' view on students' learning mode

Learning Individually	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	11	78.6	7	4.57	0.03
No	3	21.4	7		
Total	14				

As can be seen in the table above, 78.6% of teachers were of the opinion that their students liked working individually, while 21.4% did not hold such a belief. Teachers generally believe that students do not like to have interaction with their classmates and form groups. Instead, they think their students prefer to work by themselves independently of their peers. Evidently, teachers are not aware that their students do not like to work on their own, and prefer to work in other ways such as in pairs or in groups. In other words, there seems to be disagreement between students and teachers with respect to this issue.

Item 6 asked whether students liked learning by listening, reading, repeating what they hear, listening and taking notes, copying from the board, and making summaries. Results can be seen below:

Table 3: Preferring listening and taking notes

Listening & taking notes	Observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	172	78.5	109.5	71.34	0.0001
No	47	21.5	109.5		
Total	219				

Table 4: Preferring reading and taking notes

Reading & taking notes	Observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	148	67.6	109.5	27.07	0.0001
No	71	32.4	109.5		
Total	219				

"Listening and taking notes" received high percentage from students (78.5%). "Reading and taking notes," too, received rather high percentage from students (67.6%).

What can be inferred from the results displayed in Tables 3 and 4 above is that students do not want to adopt a totally passive role in the learning process, since they could have otherwise focused on the first two options, "Listening" or "Reading." They are inclined to be involved in classroom interactions and not just sit and see what is going on. This is a message for language teachers to take steps that would enable students to be as much involved in what is happening in classroom as possible.

Item 7 aimed to find out how students would like to learn new vocabulary. The options were: (1) by using the word in a sentence, (2) by thinking of relationship between known and new, (3) by saying or writing words several times, (4) by avoiding verbatim translation, (5) by guessing the unknown, and (6) by reading with no dictionary help. Table 5 displays the results:

Table 5: Using new words in a sentence

Using the word in a sentence	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	200	91.3	109.5	149.59	0.0001
No	19	8.7	109.5		
Total	219				

As is clear from results in the table, the majority of students (91.3%) give priority to using new words in a sentence. This shows that learners prefer to learn the new vocabulary by making a sentence with them and using them in a context. This obligates teachers to help students make sentences with new words in order to enhance their vocabulary learning. Such finding is in congruence with Stapa's (2003) study in which learners, who were doing an ESP course in Malaysia, preferred to learn the new words when they are contextualized.

Another option for learning new words was "Avoiding verbatim translation." Results received for this choice are tabulated below:

Table 6: Avoiding verbatim translation

Avoiding translation	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	135	61.6	109.5	11.87	0.001
No	84	38.4	109.5		
Total	219				

As shown, 61.6% of the learners expressed their reluctance towards verbatim translation as a way of learning the new vocabulary.

It can be understood from the results that students do not generally favor translating new words to learn them. One reason for this finding can be the institutes from which the data were obtained which claimed to follow a communicative approach to language teaching/learning. In recent years with a trend towards communicative language teaching it appears that our students are more and more oriented towards using authentic materials and do not like to make use of translation in their learning.

In the teachers' version, teachers were asked about their students' preference for learning vocabulary. The following table presents the pertaining results:

Table 7: Avoiding verbatim translation

Avoiding translation	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	3	21.4	7	4.57	0.03
No	11	78.6	7		
Total	14				

As is clear form the table above, 21.4% of teachers believed that their students do not like verbatim translation, while most teachers (78.6%) held that students were inclined to learn new vocabulary through translation. It can be inferred that most teachers think of translation as an effective way of teaching vocabulary, and that their students are fond of such strategy.

Another option which received relatively high percentage from students is “Guessing the unknown.” Results of this option can be observed in the following table:

Table 8: Guessing the unknown

Guessing the unknown	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	172	78.5	109.5	71.34	0.0001
No	47	21.5	109.5		
Total	219				

As can be observed, a good number of students (78.5%) expressed their preference towards guessing the unknown word as a way of learning the new vocabulary. Results show that learners are not reluctant to guess the meaning of new vocabulary or infer the meaning from the context. This shows that students are not willing to learn new words in isolation, nor by simple rote memorization. It is important that new vocabulary items be presented in contexts rich enough to provide adequate clues for students to guess a word’s meaning. The reason behind such tendency may be the fact that in students’ view, meaningful information is retained longer and retrieved more easily.

Item 8 asked students how they would prefer to be corrected by their teachers, whether they would like to be corrected immediately in front of everyone, or later at the end of the activity in front of everyone, or later in private. Results are displayed in the table below:

Table 9: Students' preference for feedback

Later feedback	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	83	37.9	109.5	12.82	0.0001
No	136	62.1	109.5		
Total	219				

As is apparent from the results, only 37.9% of the learners preferred to be corrected later in private. This is while, 62.1% of the students did not hold such a belief. This shows that students are against delayed correction and prefer other kinds of error correction such as what exists in the first two options of this item. The reason is hidden in the fact that students think of immediate correction to be more effective than delayed correction.

It seems that students do not mind having their instructors correct them immediately in front of everyone, although correcting students' errors directly may not necessarily lead to more correct language usage in the future, and even worse, it may result in negative affective feelings that interfere with learning. However, the results of this item reveal that students consider the teacher as an authority and would rather be corrected on the spot, though this may be embarrassing to some students, especially the shy ones.

As a tool for language teaching/learning, media have undoubtedly always facilitated the task of language learning and teaching. All language teachers seem to agree that media *can* and *do* enhance language teaching and learning (Brinton, 1997). Such being the case, item 10 asked students whether they like learning from (1) television/video/films, (2) radio, (3) tapes/cassettes, (4) written material, (5) blackboard, or (6) pictures/posters. Results are tabulated below:

Table 10: Television/video/films

Television/video/ films	observed	%	Expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	197	90	109.5	151.32	0.0001
No	22	10	109.5		
Total	219				

What can be inferred from the results above is that television and video, being powerful media, are most popular with language learners. The reason, according to Celce-Murcia (2001), may be the fact that such media motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context.

Another reason may be the fact that students like to see what they hear, and such media are more vivid and attention-catching than radio or tapes.

The following table presents the teachers' responses to this very option:

Table 11: Teachers' view on students' preference for Television/video/films

Television/video/ films	observed	%	Expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	11	78.6	7	4.57	0.03
No	3	21.4	7		
Total	14				

The results indicate that most teachers think that their students prefer television/video/films to other media. It is promising that teachers are aware of their students' media preference, and hence should make more effective use of such media in their teaching. In fact, since students in their daily lives are surrounded by technology, they expect to see it in their language classroom as well.

Another option to be discussed here is "Tapes/Cassettes." Table 12 displays the results of this option:

Table 12: Using tapes/cassettes

Tapes/cassettes	observed	%	Expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	153	69.9	109.5	34.56	0.0001
No	66	30.1	109.5		
Total	219				

It can be inferred from the results that students tend to listen to tapes either in classroom environment or outside the classroom. The rationale might be the fact that tapes are relatively cheap and easy to use and carry. Furthermore, they are the main source (other than the teacher) of spoken language texts in most classrooms.

Item 11 delves into the activities learners find very useful in classroom. These include role play, language games, songs, talking with and listening to other students, memorizing dialogues, getting information from guest speakers, getting information from planned visits, writing a learning diary, and learning about culture. One option which received rather high percentage from students is "Talking with and listening to other students." The results are cited in the table below:

Table 13: Talking with and listening to other students

Interacting with others	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	179	81.7	109.5	74.23	0.0001
No	40	18.3	109.5		
Total	219				

The striking point about these results is that in students' view, student-to-student interaction is highly beneficial to their learning. Students would like to talk to and listen to other students. One explanation for such preference may be the fact that when language learners interact with each other, they experience some difficulties as they attempt to use the target language to communicate. As a result, they become aware of what they need to know in order to express themselves effectively. They, then, may ask their fellow students for help. Needless to say, such interaction makes the classroom a more pleasant and friendly place.

The last option of the item was "Learning about culture." Table 14 illustrates the results received for this option:

Table 14: Learning about culture

Learning culture	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	157	71.7	109.5	34.85	0.0001
No	62	28.3	109.5		
Total	219				

It can be inferred from the results presented in Table 14 that most of the students (71.7%) believe that culture and language are interwoven and should be treated as such. Although teachers devote a good deal of time, effort, and attention to the teaching of language skills, gaining linguistic competence is not adequate for many learners to achieve their goals. To be able to communicate effectively, learners need to attain foreign language cultural competence. Results of this option prove that students are eager to attain such knowledge and are aware of culture involvement in learning. So, the burden is upon the shoulder of all EFL/ESL teachers to acquaint their students with cultural values, concepts, and norms on people' speech and behavior.

The following table shows teachers' responses to this very option:

Table 15: Teachers' view on students' preference for learning about culture

Learning culture	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	11	78.6	7	4.57	0.03
No	3	21.4	7		
Total	14				

According to the results presented in the table above, most teachers believed that students are willing to learn about culture, and are aware of the importance of developing cultural competence when learning the language. There seems to be agreement between teachers and students in this regard. Teachers are apparently aware that their students are eager to attain knowledge regarding cultural issues.

Item 12 asked about assessment. Here, the learners were asked how they would like to find out how much their English is improving. The choices were: (1) through written tasks set by the teacher, or (2) the ability to use language in real-life situations. Results are illustrated below:

Table 16: Using language in real-life situations

Using language in real situations	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	200	91.3	109.5	149.59	0.0001
No	19	8.7	109.5		
Total	219				

An overwhelming majority of the students (91.3%) stated that they would evaluate themselves and their knowledge based on their performance in authentic communications. They would prefer to judge their L2 improvement on the basis of their capability to use the language effectively in real-life communicative events, rather than being assessed formally by the teacher. Evidently, students see tests as a threat to their competence, because they are afraid that they will not perform well. Perhaps, that is why the students of the study were more willing to assess themselves based on the extent to which they are successful in real-life situations. Such finding contradicts the findings of Stapa's (2003) study in which most of the students showed their preference towards being assessed formally by the teacher.

Item 13 asked students if they get a sense of satisfaction from (1) having their work graded, (2) being told that they have made progress, or (3) feeling more confident in situations they found difficult before. Only the third option proved significant. Results can be seen below:

Table 17: Feeling more confident in situations you found difficult before

Sense of satisfaction	observed	%	expected	Chi-square	P
Yes	172	78.5	109.5	71.34	0.0001
No	47	21.5	109.5		
Total	219				

A quick look at the data presented in the table reveals that a great number of learners (78.5%) feel satisfied in seeing themselves performing successfully in situations which they felt less successfully before. There is no doubt that the satisfaction learners get from their L2 performance differs from one student to another. Some are after high marks; some after command of L2; and some after both. From the results of this choice, it is apparent that most of the students are after command of English, and feel content if they can communicate easier and more efficiently than before.

The findings are in sharp contrast with those of Kavaliauskiene's (2003) study which reported that learners seek passing their exams and getting good grades, and are not concerned with improving language skills and competence for future usage.

In conclusion, one can say that most of learners in the study seem to favor a *communicative* approach to perfecting their language skills by working in pairs/ groups, tending to be actively engaged in classroom discussions, practicing their English by talking to their peers and having interaction with other people. This is in line with Spratt's (1999) and Kavaliauskiene's (2003) studies which reported similar results.

Another point which can be inferred from the results is that students' preferences do correlate with teachers' perceptions in some instances, but not in some others. This is consistent with Barkhuizen's (1998) research which showed that teachers were frequently surprised to learn about the thoughts and preferences of their students. Simply, the students' perceptions did not match those of teachers in several cases. This study, too, showed that teachers' perceptions are consistent with those of students in some areas. This, of course, does not mean that the situation of language teaching/learning is perfect and totally satisfactory. There still needs to be closer cooperation between teachers and students as to how language learning activities should be arranged and implemented in classroom.

6. Conclusions

Some major points concluded from the study are summarized below:

1) Regarding studying style, students do not like working individually, but teachers did not know this.

2) Types of learning that emphasize receptive skills only were not appealing to students. Students expressed their views towards class content that focuses on receptive and productive skills equally. They did not like to be sitting passively in classroom, but to be actively engaged in classroom practices.
3) Students' most favored vocabulary learning strategies were using words in a sentence, and guessing the meaning of unknown words, not looking them up in dictionary. Teachers wrongly thought that their students like to learn the new words through translation.
4) Being corrected immediately in front of every one did not seem to bother students. Students did not like to be corrected later in private.
5) In terms of media, students would like to see more television programs and video films which make language learning more exciting and meaningful. Teachers appeared to endorse their students' opinion. Moreover, learners showed tendency to pictures/posters, since they would like to see what they are learning. However, some learners were more interested in listening to tapes. The former group can be labeled "visual" learners, while the latter are referred to as "auditory" learners (using two terms in Reid's (1995) classification).
6) "Language games" did not highly catch the attention of the students. But, most students enjoyed talking with and listening to other students and having interaction with each other (global learners).
7) "Learning about culture" caught the interest of both students and teachers, showing that they were aware of the crucial importance of developing cultural competence when teaching or learning the language.
8) Students would feel satisfied with their achievement in English if only they could use the language effectively in real-life situations.
9) Finally, students got a sense of satisfaction not just by getting high grades, but by seeing that they were more successful than before in using the language to communicate.

To sum up, in order to answer the third research question, learners, based on Reid's (1995) classification, were classified into several categories. However, it should be noted that this classification is partly in keeping with that of Reid; that is, it includes some of the categories touched upon by her.

Visual learners: by enjoying reading and seeing the words; enjoying seeing what they are hearing, and learning by looking at pictures/posters
Auditory learners: by enjoying conversations and the chance for interactions with others, as well as listening to tapes
Global (Relational) learners: by learning more effectively through interactions with other people
Extroverted learners: by having tendency to work in groups and have relationship with others

7. Pedagogical Implications

It was pointed out earlier that one of the reasons for conducting this study was to come across findings that could feed into classroom practice, and provide guidance for students and teachers as well as material designers and syllabus planners. Having the findings at hand, one can suggest sound implications as follow:

1) The first implication is for students. The findings of this study are helpful to students in demonstrating the importance of learning style identification. Students are recommended to identify the best way(s) through which they can learn the language more fruitfully. Knowledge of one's learning style may be beneficial in that the learner will now be aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses in terms of learning experiences. Therefore, future learning may be enriched if the learners maintain their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. Aside from that, this process will improve one’s self esteem because now the students will feel more comfortable and prepared to take on the learning challenge, also gives students the confidence needed to achieve their goals.

2) Teachers should keep in mind that students do not like working individually. So it is strongly recommended that teachers exert their utmost effort to encourage students to form groups and share ideas.

3) It is essential that teachers assign some work for students to do outside the classroom, either in the form of reviewing the day’s work or preparing for the next session.

4) Teachers need to organize the lesson content in a way that equally emphasizes both receptive and productive skills.
5) It is a good idea that teachers motivate their students to use the new words in a sentence, or try to infer the meaning of the new vocabulary. Furthermore, they should remember not to translate new words into Persian since learners do not like such vocabulary learning strategy.
6) The way error correction is done is much more important than the error itself. Teachers must be very careful and tactful in correcting errors and try to employ encouraging correction.
7) Teachers should bear in mind that students like to watch television programs or video films since they like to see what they hear. Also, they like to learn from pictures/posters.
8) Teachers ought to be aware that students like to interact with each other and be actively engaged in classroom debates.
9) Teachers should not think that their students learn English just to get grades or a degree, but also to attain command of L2.
10) Teachers should keep in mind that students would like to be evaluated on the basis of their progress and their improvement in English. They get satisfaction from their achievement in English if they see they can use the language effectively in real-life communications.
11) Teachers should help students discover their own learning preferences and provide constructive feedback about the advantages and disadvantages of various styles. Also, teachers should respect the learners' present preferences and encourage their development, while at the same time creating opportunities for students to try different ways of learning.
12) The outcomes of the study can, too, contribute to materials and syllabus design by indicating which activities or areas of language are most likely to meet with students' approval. Hence, the pivotal role of the students in the actual processes of materials and syllabus design must not be ignored.
13) Moreover, researchers may make use of the results of the present study to conduct some pieces of research as to the effect of variables such as gender, age, level of education, and cultural influences on the students' choice of learning styles.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire (Version 1)

HOW DO YOU LIKE LEARNING?

Please put a circle around your answer.

Name:

Age:

1 Male

2 Female

1) Are you satisfied with your achievement in English? YES NO

2) In class do you like learning

a) individually? YES NO

b) in pairs? YES NO

c) in small groups? YES NO

d) in one large group? YES NO

e) other (specify please) .....

3) Do you want to do homework? YES NO

If so, how much time do you spend

for homework outside class hours? ..... hours a day or ..... hours a week.

4) How would you like to spend this time?

a) preparing for the next class? YES NO

b) reviewing the day's work? YES NO

c) other (specify please).....

5) Do you want to

a) spend all your learning time in the classroom? YES NO

b) spend some time in the classroom and some time

practicing your English with people outside? YES NO

c) other (specify please).....

6) Do you like learning

a) by listening? YES NO

b) by reading? YES NO

c) by copying from the board? YES NO

d) by listening and taking notes? YES NO

e) by reading and making notes? YES NO

f) by repeating what you hear? YES NO

g) by making summaries? YES NO

h) other (specify please).....

7) When learning new vocabulary, do you like learning

a) by using new words in a sentence YES NO

b) by thinking of relationships between known and new YES NO

c) by saying or writing words several times YES NO

d) by avoiding verbatim translation YES NO

e) by guessing the unknown YES NO

f) by reading without looking up words YES NO

g) other (specify please).....

8) When you speak do you want to be corrected

a) immediately, in front of everyone? YES NO

b) later, at the end of the activity, in front of everyone? YES NO

c) later, in private? YES NO

d) other (specify please).....

9) Do you mind if other students sometimes correct your written work? YES NO

Do you mind if the teacher sometimes asks you to correct your own work? YES NO

10) Do you like learning from

a) television/video/films? YES NO

b) radio? YES NO

c) tapes/cassettes? YES NO

d) written material? YES NO

e) the blackboard? YES NO

f) pictures/posters? YES NO

g) other (specify please).....

11) Do you do the following in your class?

a) Role play YES NO

b) Language games YES NO

c) Songs YES NO

d) Talking with and listening to other students YES NO

e) Memorizing conversations/dialogues YES NO

f) Getting information from guest speakers YES NO

g) Getting information from planned visits YES NO

h) Writing a learning diary YES NO

i) Learning about culture YES NO

12) How do you like to find out how much your English is improving?

a) By written tasks set by the teacher? YES NO

b) By seeing if you can use the language you have learnt in real-life situations? YES NO

c) other (specify please).....

13) Do you get a sense of satisfaction from

a) having your work graded? YES NO

b) being told that you have made progress? YES NO

c) feeling more confident in situations that you found difficult before? YES NO

d) other (specify please).....

Appendix 2: Questionnaire (Version 2)

HOW DO YOUR STUDENTS LIKE LEARNING?

Please put a circle around your answer.

Name:

Age:

1 Male

2 Female

1) Are you satisfied with your students' achievement in English?	YES	NO
2) In class do your students like learning		
a) individually?	YES	NO
b) in pairs?	YES	NO
c) in small groups?	YES	NO
d) in one large group?	YES	NO
e) other (specify please).....		
3) Do they want to		
a) spend all their learning time in the classroom?	YES	NO
b) spend some time in the classroom and some time practicing their English with people outside?	YES	NO
c) other (specify please).....		
4) Do they like learning		
a) by listening?	YES	NO
b) by reading?	YES	NO
c) by copying from the board?	YES	NO
d) by listening and taking notes?	YES	NO
e) by reading and making notes?	YES	NO
f) by repeating what they hear?	YES	NO

g) by making summaries? YES NO

h) other (specify please).....

5) When learning new vocabulary, do they like learning

a) by using new words in a sentence YES NO

b) by thinking of relationships between known and new YES NO

c) by saying or writing words several times YES NO

d) by avoiding verbatim translation YES NO

e) by guessing the unknown YES NO

f) by reading without looking up words YES NO

g) other (specify please).....

6) When they speak do they want to be corrected

a) immediately in front of everyone? YES NO

b) later, at the end of the activity, in front of everyone? YES NO

c) later, in private? YES NO

d) other (specify please).....

7) Do they mind if other students sometimes correct their written work? YES NO

Do they mind if you as the teacher sometimes ask them to correct their own work? YES NO

8) Do they like learning from

a) television/video/films? YES NO

b) radio? YES NO

c) tapes/cassettes? YES NO

d) written material? YES NO

e) the blackboard? YES NO

f) pictures/posters? YES NO

g) other (specify please).....

9) Do you do the following in your class?

a) Role play YES NO

b) Language games YES NO

c) Songs YES NO

d) Talking with and listening to other students YES NO

e) Memorizing conversations/dialogues YES NO

f) Getting information from guest speakers YES NO

g) Getting information from planned visits YES NO

h) Writing a learning diary YES NO

i) Learning about culture YES NO

10) How do you think students like to find out how much their English is improving?

By .....

a) written tasks set by you? YES NO

b) seeing if they can use the language they have learnt in real-life situations? YES NO

c) other (specify please).....

11) Do you think students get a sense of satisfaction from

a) having their work graded? YES NO

b) being told that they have made progress? YES NO

c) feeling more confident in situations that they found difficult before? YES NO

d) other (specify please).....

Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract:
This study investigated Chinese university students' attitudes towards and motivation to learn English and the correlations of the said variables with the students' English proficiency. A modified 44-item survey adapted from Gardner's (1985) and Clément et al.'s (1994) was administered to 202 third-year non-English majors in a southern university in China. The study revealed that the students had positive attitudes toward learning English and were highly motivated to study it, that the students were more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English, and that the students' attitudes and motivation were positively correlated with their English proficiency. Based on these findings, some pedagogical implications are discussed.

Key words: attitude; motivation; undergraduate non-English majors; English proficiency

1. Introduction

The study of motivation in second language acquisition has become an important research topic with the development of the socio-educational model on second language motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985, Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivation to learn a second language is grounded in **positive attitudes** toward the second language community and in a

desire to communicate with valued members of that community and become similar to them. This latter desire is **integrative orientation**, which is a better support for language learning, while an **instrumental orientation** is associated with a desire to learn L2 for pragmatic gains such as getting a better job or a higher salary (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The role of orientation is to help arouse motivation and direct it towards a set of goals, either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative orientation) or a strong practical quality (instrumental orientation) (Dörnyei, 2001). To measure L2 learners' motivation, Gardner (1985) developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), a multi-component motivation test made up of around 130 items concerned with such variables as attitudes towards French Canadians, European French people and learning French, interest in foreign languages, orientation to learn French, French class anxiety, parental encouragement, motivation intensity, desire to learn French, and motivation index.

The development of the Battery has resulted in numerous research studies on L2 motivation, which reveal that, in general, motivation enhances second/foreign language acquisition, and that learners ranking high on integrative orientation work harder and learn faster than those who are low on integrative motivation (Clément et al., 1994; Gardner, Lalonde & Pierson, 1983; Gardner, Lalonde & Moorcroft, 1985; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft & Evers, 1987; Gardner, Moorcroft & Metford, 1989; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Lai, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Gardner et al.'s study (1983) supported the claim that proficiency in a second language was affected by attitudinal variables, which was confirmed by a later research study (Gardner et al., 1985). The study also showed that motivation had a direct effect on situational anxiety and second language achievement. In addition, two other studies led to the conclusion that integrative orientation was closely related to persistence, language attrition and retention (Gardner et al., 1987; Gardner et al., 1989).

In order to investigate the role of motivation in foreign language learning, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) applied Gardner and Lambert's (1972) social and psychological constructs to the acquisition of English in the unicultural Hungarian setting. A survey assessing students' attitude, anxiety, and motivation toward learning English as well as their

perception of classroom atmosphere and cohesion was administered to 301 students in Grade 11. Meanwhile, the teachers were asked to rate each of the students on proficiency and a number of classroom behaviors and to evaluate the cohesion of each class group. It was revealed that achievement in English was significantly related to self-confidence, the evaluation of the learning environment and the motivational indices. The attitude and effort index was also found to be related to self-confidence, the learning environment, and a cluster of affectively based attitudes and motivational factors.

As empirical studies on second language learning motivation blossom, it has been found integrative and instrumental orientations are not opposite ends of a continuum (Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994). Instead, they are positively related and both are affectively loaded goals that can sustain learning. They both may be in return enhanced by better proficiency and higher achievement in the target language (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Dörnyei, 1994, 2001). Students' **learning goals** also proved to break up into different motivation clusters, the definition of which varies depending upon the socio-cultural setting in which the data are gathered (Clément et al., 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Thus, new **motivation clusters** have been identified such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, orientations for travel and becoming intellectual which are considered specific types of orientations for learning the target language (Clément et al., 1994; Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). **Extrinsic** motivation, like instrumental orientation, refers to the desire to learn a second/foreign language because of some pressure or reward from the social environment (such as career advancement or a course credit), internalized reasons for learning an L2 (such as guilt or shame), and/or personal decisions to do so and its value for the chosen goals (Noels et al., 2001). **Intrinsically** motivated students, like integratively motivated ones, learn an L2 because of the inherent pleasure in doing so; they are expected to maintain their effort and engagement in the L2 learning process, even when no external rewards are provided (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Noels et al., 2001). When a learner has no extrinsic or intrinsic goals for learning a language, **amotivation** arises. Consequently, the learner may quit learning the target language at the earliest convenience (Noels et al., 2001). As these concepts have gained popularity, it is claimed that intrinsic

motivation plays a central role in learning a second/foreign language (Noels et al., 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

In conclusion, both integrative and instrumental orientations or intrinsic and extrinsic motivations contribute to the learning of a second/foreign language. Nevertheless, as to which one is more important varies from context to context. Likewise, students in different contexts may be motivated to learn a second/foreign language by different orientations. This is why the issue is still worth further exploration in situations with different groups of learners.

Although integrative orientation or intrinsic motivation plays a more important role in second/foreign language learning than instrumental or extrinsic motivation (Gardner et al., 1987; Gardner et al., 1989; Noels et al., 2001), it may not be true in all learning situations, especially in Mainland China. As China's economy is developing fast and Chinese people are in more contact with those from other cultures in various ways (such as attending conferences, studying and traveling), English is becoming more important. It plays a major role in determining what university middle school graduates can choose and in selecting college graduates for further education. It is also an influential factor in deciding what jobs and salaries people can get in the job market. As Chinese people become richer and have more contact with people from other countries, the probability for them to travel abroad becomes higher too. For these reasons, Chinese students are often highly motivated to study English (Hao, Liu & Hao, 2004). Nevertheless, the learning and teaching of English has long been a difficult task for both EFL students and teachers in Mainland China due to reasons such as lack of resources and little contact with the target language (Liu, 2005). Therefore, it will be interesting and worthwhile to investigate Chinese students' motivation to learn English, especially non-English majors' learning motivation because they constitute the main portion of the EFL population in the country. Surprisingly, not many empirical studies have been done in this area (Hao et al., 2004; Hu, 2002; Zhou, 1998).

In Mainland China, English courses (such as intensive reading, extensive reading, speaking, listening, and reading) are compulsory for non-English majors during the first one or two years in 3-year or 4-year colleges or universities. The type of courses and textbooks

and the teaching hours per week vary from university to university. For example, in the university where the present study was conducted, mainly the course of *College English* (reading, speaking and writing were integrated into one course with enormous emphasis on reading) was offered to the students who met the teacher(s) twice per week, each meeting lasting for two hours, while in top universities such as Tsinghua University, only a 90-minute lesson was offered to students per week. After that, English courses become selective and the majority of the students stop taking any of them, especially after they have passed the College English Test (CET) band 4[1]. Because of the absence of pressure, most students stop making efforts to learn the language. Consequently, they often find that their English proficiency decreases and feel frustrated about it and even often complain about it. Targeting third-year university students, the present study sought to identify their English-learning motivation types and their relationships with the students' achievements in English, hoping to shed some light on the teaching and learning of English for third- and fourth-year students. To achieve the aim, the following research questions were proposed:

(1) What are Chinese third-year university students' attitudes towards learning English?

(2) What are the English-learning motivation level and types of Chinese third-year university students?

(3) Is there any relationship between students' attitudes and motivation types on the one hand, and their achievement in English on the other?

2. Research methodology

2.1 Participants

202 third-year students (51 females and 151 males) in six classes were randomly selected for the study. With an average age of 21.3, these students were from Xia'men University, a national key comprehensive university situated in a harbor city in the south of China. 182 (90%) were from the Department of Mechanical Engineering, and the rest were from the Department of Business Administration and the Department of Economics and Management. Beginning to study English in junior high school and having passed the CET band 4 in the

University, all these students stopped taking any English course when the study was conducted.

2.2 Instrument

The instrument used in the study consisted of a motivation survey, an open-ended question and an English proficiency test.

The motivation survey

The motivation survey used in this study was adopted from the questionnaires developed by Gardner (1985) and Clément et al. (1994) respectively under the condition that repetition was avoided. To fit the present situation, only items about students' attitudes towards learning English and their learning orientations were retained; other items such as classroom anxiety were omitted because the students did not take any English courses when they participated in the study. Likewise, the item "English is an important part of the school program" was deleted. To better suit the EFL learning situation in Mainland China, further modifications were made. For example, items "It is important for me to know English in order to think and behave like the English/Americans do", "I like the way the Americans behave" and "It is important for me to know English in order to be similar to the British/Americans" were omitted because the students did not have much contact with native speakers of English. It was rather difficult to imagine being similar to them.

Designed on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with values 1-5 assigned to each alternative, the modified survey had two main parts: Attitudes towards Learning English (ALE) (items 1-8, see Appendix) and the English-learning Motivation Scale (MS) (items 9-44, see Appendix). The MS was composed of three subcomponents: integrative orientation (IntO) (items 9-22, see Appendix), instrumental orientation (InsO) (items 23-38, see Appendix) and travel orientation (TO) (items 39-44, see Appendix) designed by Clément et al. (1994). The survey for travel orientation was adopted mainly because the participants, living in the harbor city of Xia'men which attracts many native and foreign tourists every year, might be specifically motivated to learn English by travel, different from those living inland.

At the end of the survey, an open-ended question was added: Are you more or less motivated to learn English than when you were a first-year or second-year student? Why?

Background information

The background questionnaire was designed to obtain demographic data about the participants such as name, gender, age, and department.

English proficiency test

To test the participants' English proficiency, a 2-hour simulated CET band 4 English proficiency test was specifically designed. The test, like the real CET band 4, consisted of six parts arranged in the same order: listening comprehension (20 items, 15 points); vocabulary (20 items, 10 points); cloze (10 items, 10 points); reading comprehension (20 items, 40 points); translation from Chinese to English (5 items, 10 points); and writing (15 points). The first four parts were multiple-choice questions to test students' knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and understanding of the details, intentions and implications of listening and/or reading materials. The translation part required the students to translate five English sentences into Chinese which were excerpted from the reading passages in the test. Finally, the students had to write an argumentation of at least 150- words in 30 minutes.

2.3 Procedure

The survey items were translated into Chinese and checked twice by a professor with a Ph.D degree in translation. The survey was first piloted to a small sample and then administered to 212 third-year students in 6 classes by their content course teachers on the same day in the middle of the second term of the academic year 2002-2003. The students were asked to finish the survey within 15 minutes during the normal teaching period. All the questionnaires were collected by the teachers and given to the researcher and 202 were complete for statistical analysis. A week later, the simulated CET band 4 English proficiency test was administered to the students on a Friday evening.

2.4 Statistical analysis

The results of the survey were computed in terms of mean, standard deviation, mode, median and range to examine the students' levels of attitudes towards and motivation to learn English. The correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between the students' attitudes and English-learning motivation and their English proficiency. The responses to the opened-ended question were analyzed and calculated according to different themes (Krippendorff, 1980).

To avoid bias, only the multiple-choice objective measures—listening comprehension, vocabulary, cloze and reading comprehension were marked to examine the relationships between students' English proficiency and their attitudes and motivation to learn English.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Attitudes towards Learning English

Achieving a reliability score of .89 in the present research, the 8-item Attitudes towards Learning English (ALE) scale had significant part-whole correlations with the total score, with the mean item-total correlation being .74.

In order to know the general tendency of the students' attitudes towards learning English, the mean, standard deviation, median, mode and range of the ALE were computed. When doing so, the researcher adjusted the values assigned to different alternatives from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' of some items. Items 4-8 which expressed negative attitudes towards learning English had values assigned to their alternatives reversed. Namely, to these items, the response 'Strongly Disagree' got a value of 5 instead of 1, the response 'Strongly Agree' got a value of 1 instead of 5, and so on. Thus, the total score of the ALE revealed the respondent's degree of positive attitudes towards learning English. The higher the score, the more positive attitudes a respondent had toward learning English.

Since the ALE comprises 8 items with a score range of 8 to 40, a total score of more than 32 implies that a respondent has strongly positive attitudes towards learning English, a total score of 24 to 32 represents moderately positive attitudes and a score of less than 24 signifies (strongly) negative attitudes. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Statistical Analysis of the ALE (N = 202)

Mean	Standard deviation	Median	Mode	Range
32.31	3.01	33.00	34.00	10-38

As can be seen from Table 1, some students (with a score of 10) showed extremely negative attitudes towards learning English. To them, studying English was dull and not enjoyable at all, as indicated in the survey items. They might even hate English or would give up the study of English entirely when leaving the University. Irrespective of this, a mean score of 32.31, a mode of 34.00 and a median of 33.00 on the ALE, all far more than the average score of 24.00, indicate that the majority of the students had moderately or strongly positive attitudes towards learning English, as found in Yang and Lau's (2003) study. Many of them believed that studying English was an enjoyable experience and planned to learn as much English as possible.

3.2 English Learning Motivation

Achieving a reliability score of .746 in the present research, the 36-item English-learning Motivation Scale (MS) had significant part-whole correlations with the total score, with the mean item-total correlation being .67.

In order to know the general tendency of the students' English learning motivation, the mean, standard deviation, median, mode and range of the MS were computed. Since the scale has 36 items with a score range of 36 to 180, a total score of more than 144 on the scale implies that a respondent is strongly motivated to learn English. A total score of 108 to 144 signifies moderate motivation and a total score of less than 108 indicates no/little motivation. Namely, the higher the score, the more motivated a respondent was to learn English.

It is worth noting that the motivation survey consists of three components: integrative orientation (IntO), instrumental orientation (InsO) and travel orientation (TO). The mean, standard deviation, median, mode and range of each of these three subscales were also computed. Given the total number of items of each subscale, a total score of more than 56 on the IntO which has 14 items (with a score range of 14 to 70) implies that a respondent is

strongly integratively motivated to learn English, a total score of 42 to 56 represents moderate integrative orientation and a score of less than 42 signifies no/little integrative orientation. A total score of more than 64 on the InsO which has 16 items (with a score range of 16 to 80) implies that a respondent is strongly instrumentally motivated to learn English, a total score of 48 to 64 represents moderate instrumental orientation and a score of less than 48 signifies no/little instrumental orientation. A total score of more than 24 on the TO which comprises 6 items (with a score range of 6 to 30) implies that a respondent has a strong orientation to learn English for travel, a total score of 18 to 24 represents moderate travel orientation and a score of less than 18 signifies no/little travel orientation. It holds true for all the three subscales that the higher the score the more motivated the respondent was to learn English integratively, instrumentally, or by travel. The results are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Statistical Analysis of the MS and its Subscales (N = 202)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Mode	Range
Integrative Orientation	32.67	4.54	33.00	35.00	14-48
Instrumental Orientation	61.78	6.41	63.00	65.00	27-76
Travel Orientation	21.87	3.11	21.00	24.00	6-36
English-learning Motivation Scale	121.39	15.97	122.00	125.00	47-160

As presented in Table 2, although with a maximum score of 48.00, a mean score of 32.67, a median of 33.00 and a mode of 35.00 on the Integrative Orientation, all far below the average score of 42.00, suggest that the majority of the students were not integratively motivated to learn English, unlike Lamb's (2004) study. Some students with a total score of 14 even strongly disagreed with all the statements. All these imply that it was not a concern for the students whether they were able to better understand and appreciate English art and literature or know the life of English-speaking nations. They were not motivated to learn English to know more about British or American people either. This might be due to the fact

that the students still had little contact with native speakers or the target language in their daily life even though Xia'men is a harbor tourism city. It might also be because the students put much less effort into exposing themselves to English after they had finished all compulsory English courses and had passed the CET band 4. Most of them might just occasionally access English by watching or listening to English programs or reading English books and so on. As a result, they seldom had the idea to learn English well enough to be like native speakers of English such as American or British people.

Although the students were not integratively motivated to learn English, as seen in Table 2, they were fairly strongly instrumentally motivated to learn the language. Despite the fact that some students (with a score of 27) were not instrumentally motivated, a mean score of 61.78, a median of 63.00 and a mode of 65.00 on the Instrumental Orientation, all far above the average score of 48.00, reveal that the majority of them were strongly or moderately instrumentally motivated to learn English, as found in previous studies (Belmechri & Hummel, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991, 1993; Noels et al., 2001). To them, English was important to have a brighter future, to search for information and materials on the Internet, to be more knowledgeable, and to know what was happening in the world, as indicated in the survey items. Hence, they studied it hard.

The case was almost the same with travel orientation. A mean score of 21.87, a median of 21.00 and a mode of 24.00 on the Travel Orientation, all slightly above the average score of 18.00, indicate that most of the students were moderately or strongly motivated to learn English by travel, as found in Belmechri and Hummel's (1998) and Oxford and Shearin's (1994) studies. They believed that they needed to study English in that it would enable them to travel abroad and make their life easier when staying abroad, as implied in the survey items. In addition, the language could broaden their outlook and enable them to make friends with foreigners. This might be because of the fact that Xia'men, as a harbor tourism city, usually attracts tourists from different places of the world. Consequently, many of the students might have also developed the idea of traveling around the world.

On the whole, more than half of the students in the present study were moderately or strongly motivated to learn English because of different reasons, as evidenced by a mean

score of 121.39, a median of 122.00 and a mode of 125.00 on the Motivation Scale, all far more than the average score of 108, as reported in Table 2. Meanwhile, the students were more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English, as indicated by their mean scores presented in Table 2. Travel was a principal motivation as well.

4. Relationships between Students' Attitudes, Motivation and their English Proficiency

4.1 English proficiency test

As previously stated, only the scores of multiple-choice objective measures of the test were used in the present research to examine the relationships between students' English proficiency and their attitudes and motivation. With a possible score range of 0 to 75, the test achieved a high reliability score of .79 with the level of difficulty of .61. The result of the statistical analysis is reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Statistical Analysis of the Test (N = 202)

Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Mode	Range
48	3.61	49	51	31-64

4.2 Correlations between Students' Attitudes, Motivation and their English Proficiency

In addition to the statistical analysis of the students' attitudes towards English learning and different learning orientations, a correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between the students' attitudes and motivation and their English proficiency. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlations between Students' Attitudes, Motivation and their English Proficiency

	Attitudes	Integrative Orientation	Instrumental Orientation	Travel Orientation	Motivation Scale
Integrative Orientation	.106	1			
Instrumental Orientation	.851**	.117	1		

Travel Orientation	.724**	.201*	.889**	1	
Motivation Scale	.867**	.150	.901**	.345**	1
English proficiency	.225**	.101	.425**	.321**	.405**

*. $p < 0.05$; **. $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 4, the students' attitudes and different English-learning orientations except for integrative orientation were not only significantly but positively correlated with their English proficiency. The more positive attitudes the students had towards learning English, the higher they scored on the proficiency test (r = .225, $p < 0.01$), as found in previous studies (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner et al., 1985; Olshtain et al., 1990). Nonetheless, the coefficient was not so high as that in Gardner's studies (1982, 1985; Gardner et al., 1972; Gardner et al., 1985; Gardner et al., 1989), which might be attributed to the fact that Gardner's studies were mainly situated in SL situations in Canada while the present study targeted Chinese EFL learners. Hence, the impact of attitudes towards the target language on proficiency in that language might vary.

Likewise, the more instrumentally motivated the students were to learn English, the higher scores they achieved on the proficiency test (r = .425, $p < 0.01$). It was the same with travel orientation and the overall motivation scale (r = .321 and .405 respectively, $p < 0.01$), similar to previous studies (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner et al., 1985; Hao et al., 2004; Olshtain et al., 1990). It seemed that the more positive attitudes and the higher travel and instrumental orientations, the more proficient in English the student was. However, it might be bi-dimensional: the more proficient in English the student was, the more positive attitudes s/he had towards English learning and the more motivated s/he was to learn the language, and vice versa.

In addition, Table 4 reveals that the students' attitudes towards English learning and their learning orientations were significantly positively correlated with one another. The more positive attitudes the students had towards learning English, the more motivated they were to learn English (r = .867, $p < 0.01$). They were more instrumentally and travel motivated as well (r = .851 and .724 respectively, $p < 0.01$).

5. Conclusions and implications

This study attempted to investigate Chinese third-year undergraduate non-English majors' attitudes toward learning English, English-learning orientations, and the correlations between these measured variables and the students' English proficiency. The statistical analyses reveal that these third-years had positive attitudes toward learning English and were highly motivated to learn the language as well. This could be attributed to the fact that the rapid development of economy in China in recent years has yielded an increasingly high demand for university graduates with high English competency in various fields such as education, market, business and science and technology. Meanwhile, maybe due to limited contact with English native speakers or the target language, the students were more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English, which was different from Gardner's (1985) claim that integrative orientation was more influential in achieving success in second language learning. To have a brighter future (such as a better job) seemed to be a more deciding factor for these students to learn English than to better know or behave like the British or American people. The common instrumental orientations found among these students were: getting promoted in career development, getting a good job, searching for information on the Internet, being better educated, knowing the world, studying and working abroad. They were highly motivated by travel as well.

The correlation analysis revealed that the students who had more positive attitudes towards learning English tended to score higher in the proficiency test and that the students who were more instrumentally and/or travel motivated tended to perform better in the test. Nevertheless, more positive attitudes and higher instrumental and travel orientations might be also the result of higher English proficiency.

Despite the high motivation found in the present study, most of the students reported that they had actually become demotivated to learn English. According to their responses to the open-ended question, only 15.84% (32) of the students believed they retained the same amount of motivation as in the first two university years; 10.4% (21) thought they became more motivated in that they had a clear plan of going abroad for further education. The majority of them (149/73.76%) reported that they became less motivated to learn English

mainly because of no immediate pressure of learning English, little contact with the target language and heavy burden of major study.

As mentioned previously, most of the third- and fourth-year students, especially those who had passed the CET band 4, stopped taking any English courses. Coupled with the fact that the burden of their major study became heavier, many of the students had fewer chances to access English and/or made little effort to continue to learn the language. As a result, their English proficiency would have probably decreased. To maintain or enhance the students' positive attitudes toward and motivation to learn English and ultimately improve their English proficiency, it might be beneficial for the University to offer ESP courses throughout the university years so that non-English majors could have constant contact with the target language. Otherwise, they might lose the motivation soon since most of them were principally instrumentally motivated to learn English, while according to Gardner et al. (1987), integrative orientation played a more important role in urging adult learners to continue to learn the target language after the language class was over and helping them retain the language proficiency longer.

Because Xia'men University is a national key comprehensive university in Mainland China, the findings may have some relevance for third- and fourth-year non-English majors in other EFL learning situations across the country. However, due to the nature of the particular sample which was limited to the students at only one university, inferences drawn from the results of this study are limited. Replication of the study with language learners at similar proficiency levels with varying backgrounds in different learning contexts is necessary to understand how well the results may be generalized to other EFL students in the country. Students majoring in international business, foreign affairs and information technology and so on may demonstrate a different trend of orientation to learn English. The case may also be different if there are more female participants. Moreover, other research methods such as interviews and reflective journals can be employed to supplement the survey so that the changes or differences in attitude and motivation among students can be explained.

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[1]The CET band 4, the most important English proficiency test for undergraduate non-English majors across the country, is held once a term. It consists of six parts: listening comprehension, vocabulary, cloze, reading comprehension, translation and writing. Students, especially 4-year college students, can take it any time, but mostly in the first or second year, during their university years in order to be granted the degree of certificate upon graduation on time.

Appendix: English-learning Motivation Scale

Direction: Please answer the following items by circling the letter of the alternative which appears most applicable to you. We would urge you to be as accurate as possible since the success of this investigation depends upon it.

Name _____ Gender _____ Age _____ Department _____

Time to start to learn English _____ Passed the CET band 4 _____

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree

4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

Attitudes

1. Studying English is an <u>enjoyable</u> experience.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
2. I really <u>enjoy</u> learning English.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
3. I plan to <u>learn</u> as much English as possible.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
4. I <u>hate</u> English.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
5. I would rather <u>spend my time</u> on subjects other than English.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
6. Learning English is a <u>waste of time</u>.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
7. I think that learning <u>English is dull</u>.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5
8. When I leave school, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not <u>interested</u> in it.	A 1	B. 2	C. 3	D. 4	D. 5

Integrative Orientation

9. Studying English can be important for me because I would like to meet foreigners with whom I can speak English. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
10. Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
11. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of English groups. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
12. It is important for me to know English in order to know the life of the English-speaking nations. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
13. The British people are open-minded and modern people. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
14. Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English pop music. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
15. The Americans are sociable and hospitable. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
16. The more I learn about the British, the more I like them. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
17. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to get to know various cultures and peoples. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
18. Studying English is important to me so that I can keep in touch with foreign friends and acquaintances. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
19. I would like to know more about American people. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
20. The British are kind and friendly. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
21. The Americans are kind and cheerful. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
22. I would like to know more British people. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

Instrumental Orientation

23. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
24. Studying English can be important for me because I may need it later (e.g., for job, studies). A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
25. Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
26. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to search for information and materials in English on the Internet. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

27. Studying English can be important for me because I will learn more about what's happening in the world. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
28. Studying English can be important for me because language learning often gives me a feeling of success. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
29. Studying English can be important for me because language learning often makes me happy. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
30. Studying English is important to me because it provides an interesting intellectual activity. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
31. Studying English is important to me because it offers a new challenge in my life, which has otherwise become a bit monotonous. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
32. Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
33. Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English-speaking films, videos, TV or radio. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
34. Studying English is important to me because without it one cannot be successful in any field. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
35. It is important for me to know English in order to better understand the English-speaking nations' behavior and problems. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
36. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to get to know new people from different parts of the world. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
37. Studying English is important to me so that I can read English books. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
38. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to learn more about the English world. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

Travel Orientation

39. Studying English is important to me because I would like to spend some time abroad. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
40. Studying English is important to me because I would like to travel to countries where English is used. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5
41. Studying English is important to me because it will help me when traveling. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

42. Studying English is important to me so that
I can broaden my outlook. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

43. Studying English is important to me because without English
I won't be able to travel a lot. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

44. Studying English is important to me because I would like to
make friends with foreigners. A 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 D. 5

Open-ended question: Are you more or less motivated to learn English than when you were a first-year or second-year student? Why?

_____

_____

A Survey of the Students and Interns' EFL Writing Problems in Shiraz University of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

Writing is a complex process reflecting the writers' communicative skills. To help EFL students write in English appropriately, the teachers must take their major problems in writing into account if they are expecting a favorable outcome. This research is concerned with EFL writing problems at the university level, trying to point out the major difficulties with which Iranian students face when writing their reports. This study aims at determining the defects in writing skill of medical students. The specific objective of this study is to determine whether language skills or writing skills are the major problem areas to which our fifth year medical students and interns are confronted. In order to compare these students, 101 admission and progress notes written in the internal medicine and pediatrics wards by these students were surveyed based on systemic sampling approach. The notes were scored for language skills comprising spelling, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and writing skills including punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization. Implications of the findings for EFL writing instruction are discussed. Data analysis indicates that Iranian EFL medical students have problem both in language and writing skills, but with a higher percentage of problem in writing skills. Although grammar, vocabulary and syntax are essential for a well written report, other more important areas are significant as well. Language accuracy, although very significant cannot alone result in effective writing; what our students need is also writing skills.

Key Words: Writing skills, process genre approach

Introduction

Writing is a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer's communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL context. Research in this field has examined the nature and types of writing task and by providing better understanding of ESL/EFL students' writing needs, there has been an effort to help the development of this major skill theoretically and pedagogically (Zhu, 2004; Carson, 2001; Hale et al, 1996). Examining the features of EFL writing tasks and the students' problems in performing the task would certainly be pedagogically beneficial. As stated by Atkinson (2003), EFL students' writing in a language classroom context shows their ability to solve a rhetoric problem and their awareness of their own communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context. In spite of numerous approaches to the teaching of writing (communicative language teaching (CLT), process-based approach, product-based approach, genre-based approach, etc….) having evolved from different teaching methods, tackling EFL writing is still one of the challenging areas for teachers and students. The students of medicine in Shiraz University have to pass more English courses than those studying in other national medical universities and there is a 3 unit writing course specifically offered for graduate students. Nevertheless, these students still have many problems in their reports, notes and case histories. On the surface, when looking at the notes and reports written by students and interns involved in the clinical period and studying at Shiraz University, many EFL teachers think that grammar and vocabulary are the main problem area and that their writing would improve with remedial grammar/voc lessons. If looked more deeply, we see that the students and interns do not set out to write a good report in the first place, but a specific number of words which are organized loosely in sentences. As Widdowson (1995) points out, we need to consider the larger discourse context or the meaning that lies beyond grammatical structure. To go beyond grammar, language should be looked at as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1992).

Despite the need to write notes and also the increase in the number of medical students who write their theses in English, in Iran, there are very few researches into the difficulties encountered, or on writing courses designed to help such students write the thesis and notes

to an acceptable standard. Many studies have been done in the area of EFL writing problems but only a few of them have pinpointed and found actual problems in both areas of language skills and writing skills.

Therefore this research is concerned with EFL writing issues at the university level, trying to point out the major difficulties with which our students at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences face when writing their reports. It is hypothesized that medical students have problem in writing notes in the medical charts in the hospitals**.** The academic language has specific features and follows specific purposes and it requires the students to be trained to write in this particular social context. Such ESP courses require specific instructional and curricular approaches applied to our university writing classes. Also, language accuracy, although very significant, cannot alone result in effective writing; what our students need is also writing skills. Based on the hypotheses made, the following research questions are pursued:

1. Are grammar, vocabulary and syntax the main problem areas in EFL writing? In other words, would the EFL students' writing improve with remedial grammar/ vocabulary lessons?
2. Is lack of writing skill the main problem to which our students and interns are confronted?
3. Is there any difference between the fifth year medical students and interns in their skill in writing?

The findings of this research will hopefully have implications for teaching and will reduce the difficulties of our students in writing in English.

Material and method

Study setting

The study reported in this article was conducted at the medical school of Shiraz University in the south of Iran, which enrolls approximately 120 medical students each year. Writing requirements for these students include a three unit course, consisting of three hours weekly during the term. This course is offered by English language experts in the English department

of the university. During this course, the students are required to learn basic English structures as well as paragraph writing with different purposes and are encouraged to write both in class and through homework. After finishing their basic sciences period, these students enter the hospitals to start their clinical period as student first and then extern and intern. During this period they have to visit patients and write reports and notes in their files. This study examined 101 notes written by the fifth year medical students and interns in pediatric and internal wards of a teaching hospital of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. Upon entering the university, these students have to take part in a placement test based on which they are put in pre-university, general English I or II. The other English courses required are ESP and academic writing. Except academic writing, the other courses aim at improving the students' reading comprehension. Based on the students' scores in our English courses, their level of English ranges from lower to upper intermediate.

These notes were written in the academic year of 2004 in the hospitalized patients' charts as well as those filed in the medical record of the hospital. The notes were selected by systematic sampling from the admission and progress notes which are usually more complete than other types of notes and those written in other wards. Moreover, on-service, off-service and discharge notes were excluded due to their shortness. Therefore, the instruments of this study were the existing data while guest students, externs and foreigners were excluded from the studies. The subjects' name remained confidential by codes given to each note. Finally some of the students were interviewed to see what they view as their problems.

Analysis

The notes were analyzed to identify the major problems in EFL writing. They were examined from the point of view of language skills, i.e. spelling, grammar, syntax and vocabulary as well as for the writing skills, i.e. punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization. As to spelling, any type of mistake was considered, for example writing "admession" instead of "admission" or "daybetic" instead of "diabetic". As to grammar, such sentences as "She developing a knee pain since one month ago" were considered as wrong. In syntax, the students sometimes did not follow the rules of grammar used for ordering and connecting

words to form phrases and sentences. An example of the wrong use of vocabulary was using "breast" instead of "chest", and sometimes forgetting the word for "knee" and leaving it blank. Sometimes, there were no close relationship, based on grammar or meaning, between different parts of a sentence or between one sentence and another (cohesion). In some cases, there was no consistency or natural and reasonable connection between the parts of their notes (coherence). All such cases were considered as a mistake.

The data were then analyzed to see whether any one of the factors mentioned is the cause of the main problem in writing then a comparison was made between students and interns' skill in writing. The statistical tests used for analysis of the data were descriptive statistics and chi-squares test.

Results

To achieve the first and second research questions of this study, the data were first analyzed descriptively and the frequency tables, the percentage of errors for the 8 components described in the previous section were obtained (Table 1)

Table 1 The percentages of errorless notes, mean of errors and standard deviation

Components	Percent of errorless notes	Mean errors	S.D
Spelling	10.9	2.89	1.821
Use of Voc.	12.9	2.37	1.58
Grammar	4	3.35	1.68
Syntax	5	2.38	1.41
Punctuation	3	3.73	1.63
Cohesive Devices	5	2.84	1.65
Coherence	2	2.67	1.24
Organization	15.8	2.08	1.68

As reflected in **Table 1**, descriptive statistics reveal that the highest errorless scores are given to organization, use of vocabulary and spelling while grammar, syntax, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence comprise the most problematic areas, with cohesive devices being the maximum problem. The percentages of no error cases are very low. The use of vocabulary is better than that of correct cases in other components. The same picture is true with organization which had a higher percentage of errorless cases.

On the other hand, the results displayed in the table reveal that the means of the errors in each component are very close to each other, indicating that there is problem in all components. The mean errors of spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence are higher than others.

To further investigate whether most of the errors were generally found in the **language skills** (spelling, vocabulary, grammar and syntax) or writing skills (punctuation, cohesive devices, coherence and organization), descriptive statistics were performed. It was revealed that for language skills, the maximum of errors was 26 overall (mean=11) and for writing skill, it was 30 (Mean=11.31). Obviously, the difference between the means of the first four factors and the second ones is not statistically significant.

To answer the third research question of this study and determine whether there is a difference between the students and interns' skill in EFL writing, crosstabulation and chi-square tests were carried out. As shown in Table 2, a higher percentage of interns had less than 22 errors than the students and a lower percentage of them had more than 22 errors. The results of the chi-square test for their total writing revealed a significant difference between students and interns (P=.01), with the interns showing a higher skill in their writing.

Table 2 Comparison between both groups in their total writing

	Less than 22 errors	More than22 errors	total
students	40.4%	65.9%	51.5%
interns	59.6%	34.1%	48.5%

To further investigate the difference between these two components of writing, chi-square test was carried out for both groups in the two components. The outcome of the crosstabulation and chi-square test revealed that the difference between the two groups of students and interns for language skills (the first four factors) was not significant (2 sided= .07) and also it was non-significant for the writing skill (2 sided=.163) (Tables 3, 4)

Table 3 The comparison of both groups in their performance in 4 components of language skills

	Less than 11 errors	More than 11 errors	total
Students	41.3%	6.28%	51.5%
interns	56.9%	37.2%	48.5%

Table 4 The comparison of both groups in their performance in 4 components of writing skill

	Less than 11 errors	More than 11 errors	total
Students	44.4%	59.6%	51.5%
interns	55.6%	40.4%	48.5%

Although in their total writing (Table 2) and in the first four factors **of language skill** (Table 3) they have performed differently and the differences were statistically significant, the difference between the mean score of errors (Table 1) and also the difference between the first and second four factors (Table 4) were non-significant .

Finally to compare both groups' performance in each component individually, the results of the chi-square tests revealed a significant difference between them only in the first component of language skill, i.e. spelling (P=0.022) but not in all other 7 components

(P=0.209, 0.216, 0.632, 0.129, 0.453 and 0.608, respectively). Tables 5 and 6 summarize different parts of this section. First the differences in 8 components individually and then the differences in the components of language skill and writing skill separately and finally the difference in their total mean scores of the errors were obtained.

Table 5 Students' performance in all individual components, in language and writing skills and their total writing

Components	Mean	S D
1. spelling	3.5	1.8
2. use of vocabulary	2.6	1.5
3. grammar	3.5	1.6
4. syntax	2.5	1.4
5. punctuation	3.7	1.6
6. cohesive devices	2.8	1.7
7. coherence	2.7	1.2
8. organization	2.4	1.5
language skill components	12.3	4.5
writing skill components	11.9	4.5
total performance	24.2	8.2

Table 6 Interns' performance in all individual components, in language and writing skills and their total writing

Components	Mean	S D
1. spelling	2.2	1.5
2. use of vocabulary	2	1.6
3. grammar	3.1	1.6

4. syntax	2.1	1.3
5. punctuation	3.6	1.6
6. cohesive devices	2.7	1.6
7. coherence	2.5	1.2
8. organization	1.6	1.7
language skill components	9.6	4.3
writing skill components	10.6	4.8
total performance	20.3	8.5

As explained previously, the mean errors of the students in each individual component of language skill and writing skill are very similar to those of interns. As to the comparison of language skill and writing skill and in general, the students performed less favorably than the interns. The mean errors in the students' writing were higher than those of the interns (language skills: 1.3 V.S. 9.61, writing skill: 11.94 V.S. 10.96 and total writing: 24.2 V.S. 20.30). This indicates that although statistically non-significant, the interns have performed better in their writing.

Discussion

In order to help medical students perform EFL writing task in their academic career, understanding of the nature of writing task and students' writing needs and problems seems to be essential. The study reported here presents an effort to understand these. Although before the writing course, we offer 3-4 more other courses in reading skills, the development of which is indispensable for the development of writing skills, the students still have problems. This study identified the percentages of errors in each component of EFL writing. According to Table 1, some components of both language and writing skills cause problem for students and interns while trying to write in English. The percentages of no error cases are

very low, indicating that, overall, there is a major problem not only in language skills but also in writing skills. The use of vocabulary is better than the use of correct cases in other components. That's probably because the medical students have a good knowledge of technical terms. However, their writing reveals that in the use of general vocabulary, they have more problems. The same picture is true with organization which had a higher percentage of errorless cases. The reason is that there is a stereotype organization for writing reports starting with the patient's personal information, the complaints, symptoms, diagnosis and the drugs prescribed. But in practice we see that in writing a well organized paragraph, they still have some problems.

On the other hand, the results reveal that the means of the errors in each component are very close to each other, indicating that there is problem in all components. The mean errors of spelling, punctuation, cohesive devices and coherence are higher than others. This may suggest that discoursal aspects of writing should be more emphasized in our writing classes.

The descriptive statistics performed revealed that the difference between the means of language and writing skills was not significant, indicating that there is a major problem not only in language skills but also in writing skills. This finding was confirmed when the mean score of errors by the students and interns were compared statistically in all 8 components of writing. There was no significant difference. However, when descriptively examined, there was a difference between the scores, with the interns performing better. Therefore, they all have problem in the 8 components under the study and their writing will improve not only with remedial grammar/vocabulary lessons but also by focusing on writing skills. Of course, it can not be claimed that grammar, vocabulary and syntax are not essential for a well-written report or patient's note. Other more equally important areas such as cohesive devices, coherence, organization and even punctuation are important as well which might be ignored while over-concentrating on grammar and vocabulary. Based on the interactive approach to writing, the writer is "involved in a dialogue with his/her audience" (Johns, 1990) and he has to write effectively to have communication. A piece of writing might be good in terms of language; yet, it might not succeed the goal it has been written for and is unable to produce an effective text. In this regard, the study of Gabrielatos (2002) confirms our results, denoting

that language accuracy, although important, cannot alone lead to efficient writing which needs writing skills to be developed as well. According to him, in most cases, learners have problems both in language and writing skills.

As to the comparison of both groups in the total writing, the results of the chi-square test indicated a significant difference between them in general. The interns showed a better skill in writing. What is consistent with this finding is the fact that the difference between the two groups in the 4 components of language skill was significant; however, it was non-significant for writing skill components. Although interns write better in terms of language skills, both groups performed similarly regarding the writing skills. The difference between both groups was only significant for spelling but in all 7 other components, there was no statistically significant difference. These results were in the same line with the other results obtained in the study. Therefore, both groups had problems although interns performed better in language part. Of interest are their mean errors in each individual component of writing (8 components under the study) which were mostly similar. When these 8 components were divided into language and writing skills, the mean scores revealed that the students had more errors than the interns although these differences were statistically non-significant. Moreover, although for writing skill they were not significantly different, they showed a difference in language skills as well as the total writing which proved to be significant. In all, they had problem in all areas of writing and both aspects of writing must be focused in our classes. Better performance of interns may suggest that their more exposure to English texts during the clinical period for 2-3 years more than the students has enabled them to perform better. Therefore, in our classes we need to emphasize extensive reading.

As to the results of the interview with the subjects, it was indicated that, as expressed by themselves, the students do not have enough time to devote to writing courses and in general to their English courses due to the simultaneous offering of their specialized courses. To them, it would be more beneficial not to spend more time on English language and EFL writing classes. Secondly, their courses are not presented in English and they don’t have to write their tests in English. Moreover, they suffer from insufficient knowledge of general vocabulary so that they can write appropriately.

The results of this part, the interview as well as the author's experience with these students lead us to the conclusion that some problems go back to our classes and method of teaching and some to our students' low knowledge of vocabulary and finally their low motivation for learning writing. In order to be able to help EFL students write in English appropriately, there is a need for teachers to take the processes involved in good writing and the favorable outcomes of a writing program into account. In our classes, the teachers mostly focus on sentence level problems and try to correct the compositions sentence by sentence. As stated by Nelson and Carson (2002, p.18), this causes the students not to be able to transform their thoughts into writing and tends to privilege product over process. In a study done by Hayland (2000, p. 46), it is recommended that correcting errors does not necessarily produce learning. Based on the results of this study, if ESL writing is one of the skills of language learning, first of all vocabulary and grammar is important. The need for EFL composition instructors, therefore, is not to cast-aside sentence level learning but to find new and better ways to do it.

In addition to grammar and vocabulary work, our students' practical needs must be emphasized more; theoretical teaching does not suffice. The students must have more opportunity to write. We teachers need to facilitate the planning and production stages of writing for adult students of English as a foreign language. The problems in our classes is exactly what Holmes (2004) mentions," Teachers have trapped the students within the sentence and respond to the piece of writing as item checkers not as real readers. As he suggests, we need to develop a more top-down and student-centered approach to the teaching of writing. What is lacking in our classes is enough attention to the relevant issues of discourse and genre in our traditional, largely syntax-focused classrooms.

Secondly, through examining the notes, it emerged that although in using technical words, they have no problem, they do not have access to a normal range of vocabularies to be able to write a well-organized and appropriate note, for example using the term "febrile" instead of "temperature" as used inappropriately in a specific context. In many cases, when they need a general word like "consistency", the students apparently do not remember the word and leave it blank. Lack of vocabulary probably causes more syntactic difficulties than any other single problem. As revealed in their interview, when they don't know the word for something, they

use one of two strategies: they either use a bilingual dictionary and choose a word they have not acquired and therefore have no feeling for, or they "write around" the gap, describing the concept they are groping toward. The first strategy usually ends up with a word with inappropriate connotations, and the second often produces a complex and tangled sentence structure. What seems to be lacking is knowledge of general words since they know the technical terms in their field well, which seems to be necessary to be expanded to provide the learners with the means to access various types and levels of writing. So lexical remediation with respect to general language is recommended. As Muncie (2002) indicates, limited vocabulary is a major obstacle to students' learning to write in a foreign language. He concludes that vocabulary learning is very important to the development of ESL writing and that ESL writing instructors need to recognize and encourage vocabulary learning. Kosuth in University of Minnesota Dutch (2004) explains learning to write as reciprocally and simultaneously integrated with learning to read. Therefore, their range of vocabulary can be extended in reading comprehension classes.

Moreover, our students do not have enough motivation to learn writing during the first years of university when they have to pass their writing course. We have to justify their future need to writing to be able to overcome this lack of strong motivation. Actually when syllabus and time constraints come to the fore, there is not enough provision for practice of the writing skill in our classes, the problem that must be solved anyway.

To solve these problems in the way of effective teaching of writing some recommendations are presented hereafter. First of all, as the language teaching approaches have moved toward discoursal aspects of the language, we, as teachers of writing, need to develop a more top-down approach in our writing classes. We need to change our one-dimensional focus, i.e. reinforcement of grammatical and lexical patterns to the content and self expression. As stated by Holmes (2004), we need to change our focus from "writing to learn" to "learning to write" (p.118, developing teachers.com). To do this, Gabrielatos (2002) suggests awareness-raising in which learners are guided to discover/identify specific elements of good writing and features of different text types. Awareness raising procedures can include the following: analyzing a poorly formulated text in order to identify problems,

propose remedies, analyzing learner texts for merits/shortcomings, for style/register, ordering jumbled sentences to create a paragraph/text, etc. Of interest is what stated by the proponents of social interactionist view of language literacy that holds that a learner's early attempts at writing are grounded in speech and that the development of written language is best enhanced within a supportive conversational environment (Weissberg, 1994). Therefore, it is concluded that more class hours are needed to offer the students the chance to use and experiment with the features of good writing discussed in classroom. It is recommended that the authorities and curriculum planners arrange the medical courses in a way that in the first year of the university the students be exposed to English language and other general courses before they start their specialized courses. Furthermore, more courses and, as a result, more hours are needed to be allocated to EFL and specifically to writing courses.

As to the students' low motivation, we have to react thoughtfully to their writing. This could be of great significance because careless reaction could discourage the students from actively developing their writing “power”. Excessive stress on grammar and focus on content accuracy may make them feel burdened (Graves, 1983).

What our students in writing classes need is recycling and enough practice on activities such as analyzing the text for elements of good writing, identifying problems, ordering jumbled sentences to make a paragraph or jumbled paragraphs to make a text, finding topic and supporting ideas. To achieve this goal, more individualized work is essential if our classes are to be effective. The problem is that our classes are too crowded to do it. Moreover, a 3 unit course does not seem to be sufficient for developing such skills. As Gabrielatos (2002) points out, learners need to be involved in the process of learning since what is taught is not necessarily what is learned. In this process, recycling is essential for learning. Writing, according to Fairclough (1992) is power. To gain such power, our learners learn to write and write to learn. Fortunately, researchers have suggested solutions to writing problems of ESL/EFL writing. For more details, refer to Muncie 2002, Kasper & Petrello, 1996, Hans 2002 and Riazi & Mir, 2002.

As an example, recycling method of Gabrielatos (2002) can be used to give students enough practice in good writing in the actual classroom. He proposes a writing skill program

in a developmental cycle based on learning procedures proposed by some researchers in writing (Altrichter et al 1993, Kolb 1984). According to him, special writing lessons are necessary during which the teacher guides the learners to be aware of all elements of good writing, give examples, create chances for practice and give them feedback. The cycle involves awareness, feedback, support, practice and feed back.

Limitations of this study must be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Firstly, this study examined the notes written at two wards and one university only. Different medical schools offer different courses and even most of them offer no writing course. Secondly, the data were examined by two researchers only. Further research could involve more researchers to examine the notes. In spite of the limitations noted here, this study provides useful information concerning the major problems these students encounter when writing in English.

Conclusion

Therefore, to help EFL learners write effectively, a distinction must be made between language accuracy and writing skills. It is not only language problems to which EFL learners are confronted when trying to write; the writing problems which lie beneath the surface must be looked at as well. It is also concluded that our students need more hours of EFL and writing classes. It is concluded that different approaches to teaching writing cannot be applied in our EFL context successfully unless we take our students' social and academic context, needs and purpose of writing into account. Considering our students' problems based on the results of this study, it seems that the model proposed by Badger and White (2000), entitled as "process genre approach" would be appropriate to be used in our university writing classes. In this model, writing is viewed as involving knowledge about language (as in genre and product approaches) and knowledge of the context in which writing happens and specially the purpose of writing (as in genre approach). Therefore, writing development happens by drawing out the learners' potential and providing input to which the learners respond. Our students need to get familiar with the academic discourse and workplace, so our

teachers must emphasize the link between discourse, community and knowledge in an attempt to offer a new insight on EFL writing.

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Theme and Rheme in the Thematic Organization of Text: Implications for Teaching Academic Writing

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Abstract
This paper explores the insights concerning the relationship between Theme and Rheme derived from theory of Systemic-Functional Grammar, with the aim to improve cohesion in academic texts. The paper shows that, by analyzing Theme and Rheme in a text, the students can learn to perform the same analysis in their own writings, and thus improve cohesion in their own work. The paper begins by briefly overviewing the theoretical framework underlying this approach, in particular discussing the definition of Theme and Rheme, together with three common problems resulting from misuse of Theme and Rheme, and overall Thematic Progression in an academic text. Using a university student's writing as an example, the paper demonstrates the application of this approach to show how the student's textual cohesion could be improved. The paper concludes by exploring the pedagogical implications of the relationship between Theme and Rheme.

Keywords: Theme; Rheme; Thematic Progression

Introduction

It is generally recognized that many second language learners have difficulties with writing. One of the main difficulties is lack of cohesion in their writings, which contributes substantially to lower scores in examinations (Bamberg, 1983). Studies of cohesion often focus on cohesive ties as part of creating textual cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976); however, cohesive ties themselves are not sufficient to create a coherent text (Stotsky, 1983).

So far there has been little pedagogic use made of the relationship between Theme and Rheme to the teaching of academic writing. Research done by Witt and Faigley (1981) found that students write better papers when they develop an ability to use Theme and Rheme more effectively in their writings. Currently, many language teachers still focus their feedback to learners on errors which occur below the clause level, such as lack of subject-verb agreement, incorrect use of verb tenses, and so on. They feel the lack of tools necessary to analyze their students' texts at the discourse level. The purpose of this paper is to apply insights gained from observing patterns of Theme and Rheme relations in students' writings to help improve cohesion at the discourse level. The paper begins by overviewing the theoretical framework underlying this approach, in particular discussing the definition of Theme and Rheme, it goes on to examine three common problems resulting from misuse of Theme and Rheme and its affect on Thematic Progression in academic writing. Using a university student's writing as an example, the paper demonstrates the application of the approach to diagnosing language weaknesses in the student's writing and to show how textual cohesion could be improved. The paper concludes by exploring the pedagogical implications of the relationship between Theme and Rheme.

Theoretical Framework

What is Theme and Rheme?

The theoretical principles underlying the study of Theme and Rheme are derived mainly from the theory of Systemic-Functional Grammar, but these issues have been debated in linguistic research as early as the eighteen century (Weil, 1844). In Weil's influential thesis of 1844, he called *point of departure* and *enunciation* to refer to the structural division within a clause. Following Weil, linguists have produced quite a range of terms, such as *topic* and *comment* (Bates, 1976), *topic* and *dominance* (Erteschik-Shir, 1988) etc, in attempting to account for the certain aspects of the communicative function of a sentence. Theme and Rheme, on the other hand is the one favored by Halliday (1968, 1985), whose insights in this area form a very important part of this paper.

Theme and Rheme are two terms which represent the way in which information is distributed in a sentence. The definition of Theme given by Halliday (1985, p.38) is that Theme is given information serving as "the point of departure" of a message. The given information is the information which has already been mentioned somewhere in the text, or it is shared or mutual knowledge from the immediate context. In other words, Theme typically contains familiar, old or given information. Theme provides the settings for the remainder of the sentence – Rheme. Rheme is the remainder of the message in a clause in which Theme is developed, that is to say, Rheme typically contains unfamiliar or new information. New information is knowledge that a writer assumes the reader does not know, but needs to have in order to follow the progression of the argument. The boundary between Theme and Rheme is simple: Theme is the first element occurring in a clause; the remainder clause is Rheme. For example:

Theme	**Rheme**
The lion	beat the unicorn all round the town
All round the town	the lion beat the unicorn
However, the unicorn	still did not want to bow to the lion
The lion	decided to beat him to death
Would the unicorn	give in to the lion
When the lion got to the battle field	the unicorn was ready for the battle

From the above division of Themes and Rhemes in the sentences, we can see that Theme is not equated with the subject of a sentence; nor is Rheme equated with the predicate. However, in the example given above, two sentences e.g. in the first and fourth sentence, it happens that the Theme 'The lion' overlaps with the grammatical subjects of the sentences. This kind of Theme Halliday (1985) calls unmarked Theme. He states that unmarked sentences typically have Themes that overlap with subjects. On the other hand, marked sentences often contain a Theme that is separate from the subject containing pre-posed adverbial groups or prepositional phrases, for example 'All around the town' is Theme in sentence 2 above. From the above sample, we could conclude that Theme may be realized by a nominal group, verbal group, adverbial group, prepositional phrase or a dependent clause. The characteristic of these elements is that they appear first in a clause and represent 'given'

information. All the rest of a clause is Rheme representing ‘new’ information. Knowing where to place the Theme-Rheme boundary in a more complex sentence requires a careful reading of the sentence in context to understand the meaning a writer is communicating. In a study of spoken data conducted by Lovejoy and Lance in1991, they found that there was a noticeable pitch drop at the end of Theme, and near the beginning of Rheme, often on the first word, an abrupt peak in pitch level.

The initial place has an enormous importance in a clause. Whatever is chosen to be in the first place will influence a reader’s interpretation of everything that comes next. Accordingly, in cohesive writing, ‘given’ information in a clause needs be presented in Theme position, which acts like a signpost signaling a reader where the meanings have come from and where they are going to. The new information needs to be located in Rheme position. The balance and movement of a clause between Theme and Rheme is an essential component in composing a cohesive text. If a writer fails to control the flow of information from Theme to Rheme, his or her text is difficult for a reader to follow, because there is no clear signpost directing the reader, who therefore cannot easily follow the progression of an idea or argument.

The problems of inappropriately handling the flow of Theme and Rheme are quite common among inexperienced writers. Bloor & Bloor (1992) identify three common problems resulting from misuse Theme and Rheme.

The problem of the brand new Theme

The problem of a brand new Theme is extremely common in the work of inexperienced writers, who put new information in Theme position. For example, the illiteracy rate is quite high in some rural areas. Here Theme ‘The illiteracy rate’ is in Theme position in the sentence, however this is the first mention of this information. Where this goes wrong, the communication can suddenly break down at the sentence level.

The problem of the double Rheme

The problem of the double Rheme means a sentence has two Rhemes with one of the Rheme not mentioned previously. For example, **t**he educational reform had a big influence on young teachers and the students' families paid a lot of money for their children. There are two Rhemes in this clause. One Rheme is 'had a big influence on young teachers'. The other Rheme is 'had a big influence on the students' families'. The latter Rheme has had no previous mention.

The problem of the empty Rheme

The problem of empty Rheme is also common in students' writings, who fail to present 'new' information in Rheme position. For example, lack of qualified teachers is a serious problem. Rheme 'is a serious problem' fails to offer any information, which should be mentioned previously or it is shared by the potential readers.

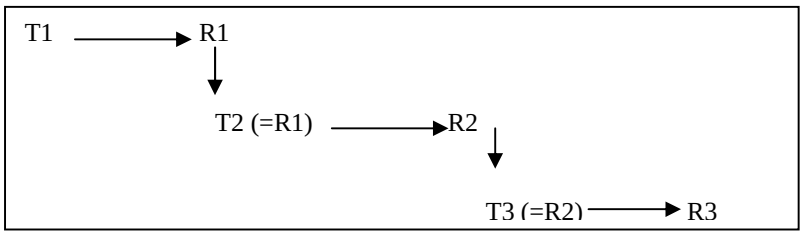
Thematic Progression

The flow of information in a sentence from Theme to Rheme is crucial in achieving communicative effectiveness in a message. The exchange of information between successive Theme and Rheme pairings in a text is called Thematic Progression (Eggins, 1994). Thematic progression contributes to the cohesive development of a text, that is to say, in a cohesive text the distribution of given and new information needs to follow certain patterns. There are several main types of Thematic progression, which depends on different text types. For example, in a narrative-type text we often repeat Theme of one clause into Theme of subsequent clauses. For example,

Theme	**Rheme**
A good teacher	need show great passion to the teaching
He or she	should be intellectually and morally honest
He or she	should have a genuine capacity to understand students

However the Thematic development of an academic text is different. Fries (1983) made the point that the Thematic progression of an academic text needs to have a high incidence of

cross-referential links from the Rheme of one clause to the Theme of the next clause, as the academic texts present complex arguments in which each successive ideas is an expansion of an idea in the previous sentence. The Thematic development of an academic text is illustrated below:



Let us have a look at an example of Thematic progression in an academic text:

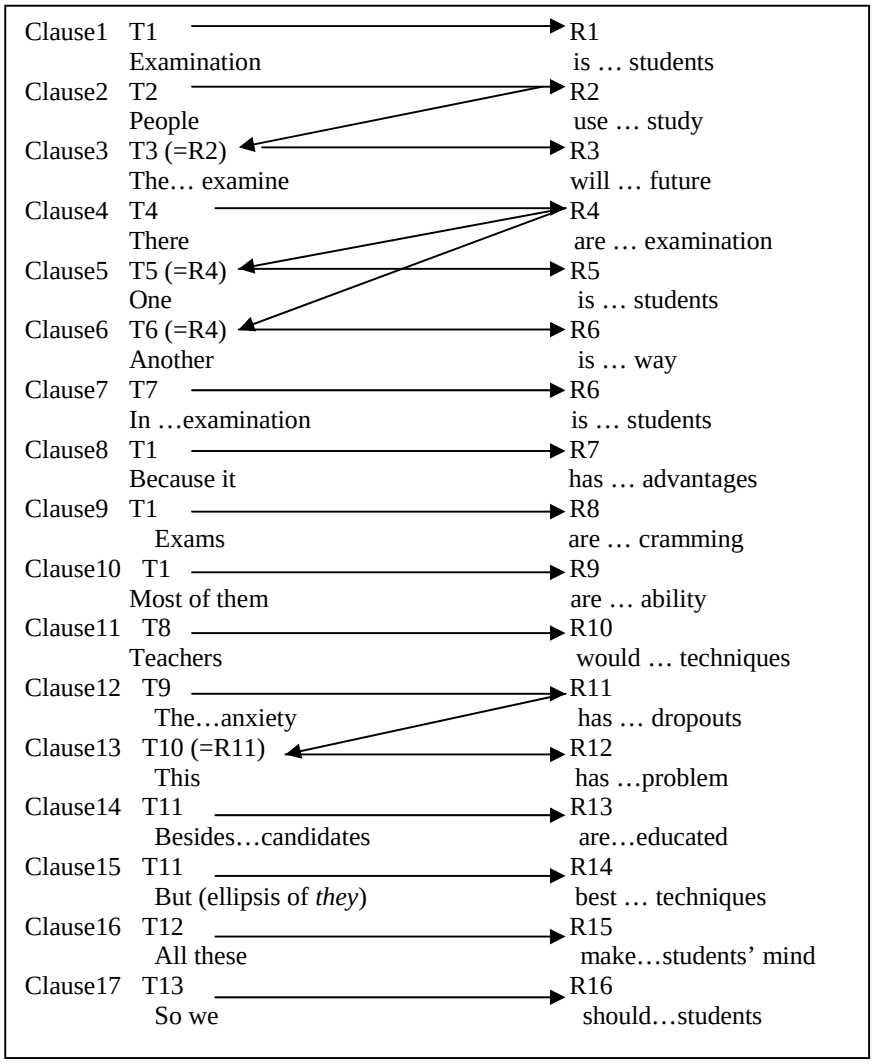
'To stop the outbreak of the unknown disease, two medical teams were sent immediately to the affected area in Sichuan to diagnose the disease. Each medical team was formed by ten doctors selected from the first-rate hospitals across the country. The expertise of all the doctors was well-known in China, and some was world-famous.'

In this example, the infinitive 'to stop the outbreak of the unknown disease' is Theme, 'two medical teams' first appearing as Rheme in the first clause becomes Theme of the second clause. The element 'doctors' which is Rheme of the second clause becomes Theme of the third clause. This text demonstrates high cross-referential linking between Rheme of one clause and Theme of the next. This Thematic progression gives a reader orientation as to where the information has come from and where it is going, and hence creates cohesion in a written text.

Diagnosing a Student's Writing

The text to be analyzed was written by Bai, a sophomore majoring in Politics from South-Eastern University in China (see Appendix 1). A detailed analysis of Theme-Rheme structure can help us to diagnose whether her text is cohesive or not, and if not, how it can be improved.

Theme-Rheme structure of the text by Bai



Based on the above analysis, we conclude her text is lacking in Thematic progression. There are only four instances of cross-referential Thematic progression in Bai's text. At these four points new information is sited in Rheme position and becomes the Theme of the next clause (T3=R2, T5=R4, T6=R4, T10=R11). Therefore, the overall effect is of a stream of disconnected ideas, which contributes significantly to the sense that the text is lacking in the development of ideas. For example, the first two sentences present two separate, unconnected pieces of information about examinations; Theme of the second clause has no

cross-referential link with Rheme of the first clause. If we take up Rheme in the first sentence to incorporate it as Theme in the second sentence, then the two separate ideas are linked and developed:

The results of examination are used as criteria for measuring a student's achievements

Another problem in terms of Thematic progression is student Bai overuses constant progression, where the same Theme is chosen over several clauses or sentences. Bai uses 'Examination' in Theme position a total of four times out of seventeen clauses. In these cases, the text often reads like a list, as there is a lack of further development of Rheme. Bai tends not to expand on information introduced in the Rheme. As we mentioned earlier, narration and description are characterized by constant progression to provide a more static text. While in an argumentative text the cross-referential links from the Rheme of one clause to the Theme of the next clause can provide a more dynamic effect. The problem of overuse of constant progression is quite common in students' academic writings, in which they overuse either 'There', or personal pronouns and indefinite pronouns in the Theme selection.

Starting a sentence with Theme is especially useful in helping students to communicate their ideas successfully. However, the implications of Theme go beyond the clause, where Theme and Rheme pattern of the clause can be seen as merely a micro-level realization of organization. The same principle can operate at from macro to micro level in a given text. A dependent clause may act as Theme for a complete sentence; a topic sentence may act as Theme for a paragraph; a paragraph likewise can acts Theme for an entire text. In Bai's text, the third paragraph seems to start abruptly. There is no close link between the second and third paragraph, in which a topic sentence is needed to act as Theme to the third paragraph. If we add a topic sentence 'There are three negative sides of examinations', the third paragraph is closely linked with the second paragraph.

The problems of misuse Theme and Rheme can also be seen in her text. There are two instances of brand new Themes in her text. One occurred in the second clause, and was just analyzed. Another is in the eleventh clause. Theme 'teachers' is in Theme position, and

hence expects to indicate given information; yet this is the first mention of ‘teacher’ in the text. One strategy of avoiding this problem is to rewrite the sentence to make ‘teachers’ sited in Theme position. The reconstruction of the sentence can be done through the process of nominalization. Nominalization refers to turning things that are not normally nouns into nouns. The main elements of clauses that get turned into nouns are verbs (e.g. *to extend, to consume, to submit* become *extension, consumption, submission*), and conjunctions or logical connectives (*because* becomes *reason*). By nominalizing action and logical relations, we can organize our text not in terms of ourselves, but in terms of ideas, reasons, causes, etc. Once these elements have been placed in Theme position, they can be commented on in Rheme.

In addition to the use of nominalization, we can also add adverbial, prepositional or infinitive phrases in front of ‘teachers’ so that it appears in Rheme position. Thus the eleventh clause could be changed to:

To relieve the heavy pressure of exams, the teachers need to teach students some exam techniques.

The problem of double Rheme does not appear in her text. We take the example earlier in this paper.

The educational reform had a big influence on young teachers and the students’ families paid a lot of money for their children.

There are two Rhemes in this clause. One Rheme is ‘had a big influence on young teachers’. The other Rheme is ‘had a big influence on the students’ families’. The latter Rheme has had no previous mention. One way of rectifying the problem is to make use of the phrase ‘not only…. but also…’, which is a device for presenting given information before new information. Using the above device, this clause can be changed to:

The educational reform had a big influence not only on young teachers but also on the students’ families, who were paid a lot of money for their children.

The problem of the empty Rheme also appears in her text. She made a similar mistake in the eleventh clause:

The teachers would teach students exam techniques.

The problem here is that Rheme is virtually free of information. What are the exam techniques? The text does not tell us anything about them. There are two ways of overcoming this problem. One way is to add new content to Rheme to make Rheme complete. This sentence can be changed to:

The teachers could teach students some exam techniques, such as how to read between the lines and how to understand questions etc.

Another solution would be to build up Theme so that it suggests a great deal of pre-supposed information. This technique leads to a sentence with a high density of information, which is so typical of academic writing. The following revision is a good try.

Currently, the techniques of relieving exam pressure come to the attention of the Department of Education.

By working on Thematic progression and Thematic selection to improve cohesion in Bai's text, a second draft of the text could be something like this (see the Appendix2). Learners need try to avoid these problems resulting from misuse of Theme and Rheme in their writings.

Pedagogical Implications

To convey information effectively, writers must be able to control the flow of given and new information in developing the argument in the text. A focus on Theme and Rheme structure in a clause can have startling and immediate results in teaching writing. Once a language teacher shows learners how to properly arrange old and new information, the students have gained a powerful tool for managing the meanings of their writings. The learners can consciously and strategically draw on this knowledge to construct cohesive writing. The cohesion in students' writings can be improved dramatically if attention is given to Theme selection and Thematic progression in texts.

The relationship between Theme and Rheme is essential in creating a cohesive text. However, the insights gained from Theme and Rheme pattern are valuable in teaching writing as well as in teaching literacy. The notion of Theme can show students how to read effectively by paying attention to the first paragraph, the topic sentence of each paragraph,

and Theme of a clause. Generally, the first paragraph orients a reader to what the text will be about and predicts the topic sentences of each paragraph of the text. A topic sentence orients a reader to what a paragraph will be about, and it tends to predict the Themes of the sentences in the paragraph. Theme of a clause orients a reader to the message in clause.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the insights gained from the relationship between Theme and Rheme to improve cohesion at the level of discourse. Teachers need to look beyond the traditional grammar of the clause when teaching writing. The paper shows that Theme and Rheme patterning can be effectively applied in classrooms to diagnosis students' weaknesses. Students' weaknesses in their arguments are due to problems with either Thematic progression or Thematic selection, or both. The paper demonstrates useful solution to these problems. In addition to equipping teachers with an effective instrument in teaching writing, the insights gained on the relationship between Theme and Rheme are valuable in teaching literacy.

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Appendix 1: My Views on Examination (the original text by Bai)

Examination is a common way of testing students. People use the score to judge your study. The score by examine will influence your future.

There are two different views on examination. One is that examination is the best way of to test the students. Another is not the best way. In my opinion, I believe examination is not the best way to test the students, because it has more negative influence than its advantages. Exams are the results of cramming. Most of them are tests of memories, working under pressure, not ability. Teachers would teach students exam techniques. The heavy pressure of exams and anxiety has increased number of suicide dropouts. This has been a very serious society problem. Besides, most successful candidates are not best educated, but best trained in techniques.

All these make examination the worst thing in students' mind. So we should change the condition and find a better way to test the students.

Appendix 2: My Views on Examination (after improving coherence)

Examination is a common way of testing the students. The results of examination are used as criteria for measuring a student's achievements, and the results can sometimes influence a student's future.

There are two different views on examination. Some people think examination is the best way of testing students; others do not think so. In my opinion, examination is not the best way of testing students, because the negative side of examination overweighs the positive side. There are three negative points of examination.

Firstly, most of the exams are testing students' memories rather than testing students' real abilities. Secondly, the heavy pressure of exams is a major cause for some psychological problems among students, such as anxiety, quitting school and even suicide. The increased number of committing suicide has been a serious social problem. Finally, there is no direct link between high scores and future success. Many successful politicians and businessmen did not get high scores during their studies, but they still have achieved success in their lives.

In short, examination is not the best way of testing students. A better way to test students should be found through reform on examination system.

The Contribution of EFL Programs to Community Development in China

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Abstract
This article examines the link between the contributions of EFL programs and sustainable community development in China by examining the recent developments in a small northeastern city. It seeks to spur greater dialogue on the value of EFL education initiatives as a means toward greater community empowerment for developing nations throughout Asia, and the need for a more concrete assessment tool for governments to use in evaluating the cost/benefits of EFL programs in regard to community development.

Key Words: sustainable development, community empowerment, educational opportunities, globalization, social change

Introduction

This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of EFL as it relates to collective community empowerment, improved quality of life, and the resulting contributions to national progress in China which can be applied to other developing nations across Asia. Currently, the nation of China is undergoing a tremendous surge of development with new government emphasis on economic, educational and structural reforms. As a rapidly developing nation China is rushing to train its future leaders in spoken English through a vast array of EFL initiatives. Over a quarter of all published books relate in some way to English language learning, and the command of English is considered an important means for providing communities with access to empowering resources for the nation's future.

Questions posed by this study aim to analyze how EFL is serving to facilitate the community development process at the grassroots level by considering the recent development of one small city in northeastern China. The paper will address whether the EFL programs in that city are effectively contributing to community development and local empowerment. It will consider the role played by native and non-native EFL teachers in the context of local citizen empowerment and the cultural issues raised. Finally, the study will form conclusions as to whether the large proportion of money and educational resources being spent on EFL programs in countries like China where English is aggressively taught, can ultimately be justified. The study also proposes the need for a practical assessment tool to assist local governments in evaluating the cost/benefits of EFL programs in regard to attaining China's national, social and human development goals.

Background of the Chinese EFL system

The modern world has embraced English as the current 'lingua franca' of higher education, international commerce, tourism and diplomacy. International collaboration and global exchange depends on effective communication across the medium of language. China, one of the world's most ancient civilizations with a recorded history of nearly 4,000 years, is home to over 1.3 billion citizens according to the National Bureau of State statistics (*China Yearbook,* 2004). Credited with some of mankind's most important inventions including gunpowder, the compass, printing and paper, the massive nation holds an important place for developing an international economy and educational globalization in the future. Nevertheless, in spite of great strides in progress and the rapid per capita GDP increases, basic community development needs continue to be a pressing issue with 52% of the population living on US $2 a day, 62% not having adequate sanitation facilities, and 25% living without access to a safe water supply (Free the Children, 2003).

Some experts point to educational shortfalls and the comparatively low percentage of individuals with any level of higher learning as being the main hurdle for effectively meeting rapid development needs in China (*Liaoning Province,* 1999). Development patterns in other countries show that investment in human capital is a major factor for sustainable community

development. No nation can maintain rapid growth without having a highly trained and literate labor force. With English gaining status as the primary global language in almost every trade and profession, literacy now often includes and assumes the need for competence in English. In fact the learning of English is quickly becoming a regular component of general education in the Chinese public education system. This is particularly evident by the stringent English requirements placed on all Chinese university students both for initial entrance and later eligibility to graduate.

Considering China's rich history, diversity and potential as an emerging world power, there seems to be a need to examine the social, political, economic and cultural consequences of the high priority placed on English learning in relationship to community development and national capacity building. In China the State Council is the highest government administrative body responsible for carrying out the policies of the Communist Party and the laws enacted by the National People's Congress regarding internal politics, economics, culture and education (*The State Council,* 2005). Before the People's Republic of China was formally established in 1949, China had a population of less than 500 million, of whom 80% were illiterate. Adamson and Morris (1997, p. 1) describe how changes in the political environment of China have significantly influenced the development of English language curriculum and pedagogy. English syllabus and teaching materials developed after the civil war of 1949 changed significantly to reflect the new political, economic and academic climates of the time. In the same period the industrial expansion of the mid 1950's rekindled an interest in learning English across much of China. The 1960's brought more changes as Soviet educational models were rejected in an attempt to move education toward a modern professional orientation. This reform was followed by the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 which disrupted all instruction in schools across China. Recognizing the critical importance of national development and cooperation with the rest of the world, Deng Xiaoping instituted a new principle in 1983 that, 'Education should be geared to the needs of modernization of the world and of the future' (China in Brief, 2000). Ever since the 1990's there has been a great push in China to educate children in the English language with Chinese

leaders advocating EFL study as a necessity in acquiring global technological expertise and fostering international trade (Adamson & Morris, 1997, p. 3).

From the beginning of China's opening up, English programs have been constrained by traditional teaching methods, outdated language materials, stress on rote learning methodology, and an emphasis on knowledge acquisition rather than language skill (Luchini, 2004, p. 2). In primary school students begin learning Basic English in the early grade levels with a focus on listening, reading and writing. As the students get older emphasis on ability in English is often targeted toward passing the nationwide standardized English proficiency tests. These tests are part of the national college English curriculum which was established to 'develop in students a relatively high level of competence in reading, an intermediate level of competence in listening, and a basic competence in writing and speaking' (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1986, p. 1). All university non-English majors are required to study at least two years of English and to pass a standardized English assessment known as the College English Test Band 4 (Wang & Cheng, 2005, p. 5).

Only recently has China seen an emerging trend to focus teaching methods on what students can do with the English language as opposed to a technical knowledge of language and grammar. This change is designed to meet the new demands of social and economic development in contemporary Chinese society where students with high language proficiency are highly sought in the job market. Leverett (2004, p. 1) traces the historical background of EFL to demonstrate how three distinct phases of modern English teaching have emerged in the 20th and 21st centuries with the use of phonetics, the acceptance of the scientific approach to language teaching, and the recent dominance of the communicative educational approach. Schick and Nelson (2001, p. 302) concur that the past 40-50 years have led to a shift in EFL education toward an oral proficiency model designed to help students achieve language skills for communicating their thoughts and feelings in common situations. Though China has lagged behind other countries in this trend, in many Chinese colleges and universities where native English teachers are employed the model is increasingly being followed to promote the students understanding and appreciation of global cultures, lifestyles, customs, values, attitudes and beliefs.

EFL in a typical small northeastern city

The northeastern city of Benxi is a small Chinese industrial city of over a million, divided into four educational districts. Within each of these districts there are a growing number of public and private schools within easy walking distance of most community members. Benxi has one university, fifty public secondary schools and three hundred primary schools (Liaoning Basic Data, 2004). At the primary level students begin learning Basic English and grammar to a limited degree in the first grade. As the students get older emphasis on the academic learning of English grows until most students attend at least two English classes per day by the time they reach high school. For those families who can afford it, students are enrolled in additional private English classes at night or on weekends. Some progressive public schools in Benxi have begun experimenting with bilingual education with around 100 schools across Liaoning Province teaching courses such as mathematics, geography and chemistry in the English language (China Education and Research, 2002). Approximately fifteen native English speakers are employed in the city in the private and public sectors to assist students with conversational English in preparation for future studies abroad and employment in the global marketplace. Government leaders also hope that continuing contact with foreign teachers will provide impetus for future international cooperation, joint-venture investment and further community advancement.

China has established 2010 as the timeframe to achieve a basic education goal of lifting the country's education level to a comparable standard with the world's other relatively developed countries (*Chinatoday.com*, 2004). The Benxi local government has followed the central governments lead by highlighting the development of education as the basis for two major strategies to improve the quality of life and bring rejuvenation by relying on science and education for achieving sustainable development (China in Brief, 2000). In 1999 the Ministry of Education enacted an action plan aimed to vitalize the education system for the 21st century by accelerating the course of reform. In 2001 English was made compulsory in primary schools from Grade 3 and optional in lower grades. In Benxi new curriculum arrangements and education quality evaluations were instituted stressing children's comprehensive ability alongside their performance on standard achievement tests (China

Education and Research, 2002). These reforms have propelled Benxi and the larger area of Liaoning Province to educational gains in student enrollment at secondary schools from 31.1% in 1978 to 42.9% in 2003 and at colleges and universities from 1.2% in 1978 to 4.9% in 2003 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2004).

Linking these advances to English language learning, ninety percent of the primary and secondary schools maintain active EFL programs (*Basic Statistics on Education, 2000).* The EFL programs in China tend to follow three basic models as characterized by Graddol (2006, p. 86-88). The first model involves content and language integrated learning where English teaching occurs through the study of specialized content such as science or business. Such English courses taught for a particular purpose are especially popular with older more advanced learners at the college or adult level. The second model is labeled teaching and learning English as a lingua franca. The goal in this approach is to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Chinese learners themselves with many elements being effectively taught in a mother-tongue curriculum. This model includes EFL courses that are designed to help students in passing the required English examinations. The third model is designated as English for young learners, sometimes taught in an English-only classroom, where English is frequently being introduced at younger and younger ages. A growing number of private EFL schools tailor their programs to this comparatively large and profitable market of young Chinese students.

China has a long history of private education since the first private school was founded by Confucius more than 2,500 years ago (Lin, 1999, p. 3). During the time of the emperors, private education was the main means of preparing individuals for the imperial examination which selected talented people from all segments of society to assist in governing the country. The appearance of a growing number of private EFL schools in modern China reflects significant changes in the country's social class structure and the new demands being placed upon the education system (1999, p. 181). In a recent survey, over a quarter of primary and middle-school parents thought that private EFL schools were important in order to supplement the insufficiencies of the large public school classrooms (1999, p. 141). This fact has led to the establishment of many private language schools which boast smaller class sizes

and a more efficient conversational learning environment for students. In Benxi private English schools have multiplied from less than ten in the city five years ago, to over fifty in 2005 (Hao, 2005). Some of these schools offer dynamic EFL programs and boast high language achievements by following the principle that, 'Language learning is primarily a learner and learning-oriented activity' (Eslami-Rasekh & Valizadeh, 2004, p. 1).

Community Development Advances in Benxi

One commonly accepted goal of community development is to achieve a qualitatively better life with higher standards of living, greater economic growth and more sophisticated technology (Kenny, 1999, p. 9). In order to achieve this, community development involves incorporating both old and new ways of thinking and requires a cooperative effort between the people and government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the community (1999, p. 15). At the same time as educational gains in Benxi were realized, community development gains were seen as the overall livelihood of people increased with income percentage spent on daily necessities falling and the per capita disposable income rising to 6,981 RMB (United Nation Economic and Social Commission, 2006). Another indicator of a rising standard of living and improved quality of life on the technological side is the increase of telephone and mobile phone subscribers to over 42% of the inhabitants by 2003 with internet users also on the rise. Highly visible community improvements can be seen across the city with the building of new roads, apartment complexes and the development of a more reliable infrastructure for water, sewage and power systems.

Nationally the per capita GDP has seen phenomenal growth from just $206 in 1980 to $1,100 in 2003 (United Nation Economic and Social Commission, 2006). Nevertheless there is still far to go for China's community development as Shen (2003, p. 13) states that, 'The term well-off society is commonly heard in China these days, and to some is a reality…with internet access, ownership of a comfortable apartment, and time for spiritual, educational and cultural pursuits…to the 28.2 million people still living in poverty, the concept of a well-off society is just a pipedream'. One broad means of measuring community development is

through the United Nations Human Development Index which focuses on measurable dimensions of human development including living a long and healthy life, being educated, and having a decent standard of living. In the 2004 Human Development Report China was ranked 94th out of 177 countries showing that the nation still lags behind in its development agenda (United Nations Human Development Report 2004, p. 1). Many Chinese leaders see the greater educational opportunities and new ways of thinking available through EFL programs as a key factor in raising the standard of living for all people.

An additional side to community development advancements includes a number of elements that are much more difficult to quantifiably analyze and classify since they are simultaneously influenced by many factors. With the exposure to new ideas brought about through EFL as well as media and other influences, there is a resurgence of innovation springing up in cities across China as people try to seek out the best of both worlds. For example, in a growing number of hospitals medical treatment often combines traditional Chinese medicinal knowledge with Western methods to produce more effective results. The marketplaces are filled with racks of clothing that display a blend of western and traditional wear. Modern appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves are adding convenience to the lives of families by saving time and effort in the daily cooking chores. The previously common sight of people sitting on street corners washing clothes with their washboards is becoming rarer as modern washing machines find their way into homes. Such evidences of improvement in the people's quality of life can partially be attributed to exposure to Western advancements through the medium of the English language. As more and more students study EFL and learn about world cultures, the desire to see progress and development occur within their family and community grows. Thus, through EFL, the students' horizons are broadened beyond the confines of a single language and culture.

One case study conducted by Simpson, Wood and Daws (2003, p. 277) on community empowerment and capacity building revealed the challenges in facilitating capacity building and community ownership of programs without creating unreasonable pressures on the community members. The study documents that many community development initiatives often falsely assume that community and individual resources of time, energy, and money are

constantly renewable. ‘The establishment of a new initiative in a community requires careful consideration of the social impacts that may result – both short term and long term…each new initiative demands a share of already limited stocks of time and energy, and so the community’s social infrastructure shifts as individuals are forced to make difficult choices about where to direct their energies’ (2003, p. 280). As EFL swells to take a larger role in Chinese communities, criticism concerning the demand on resources, time and energy which could be spent in other areas such as native language learning and culture has increased. The challenge for China and other developing countries is how to maintain national culture and identity in the face of globalization and growing multilingualism.

Cultural issues in EFL

Throughout China the teaching of English has had an influence on social change by providing knowledge and democratic ideas from other cultures. Education has the ability to introduce individuals to knowledge which they can use collectively in their efforts to change society for the better. ‘Education for citizenship is concerned with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for citizens to participate meaningfully in society’ (Usher, Bryant & Johnson, 1997, p. 28). Historically in China, the reigning emperors and the Communist Party tended to use government as an establishment to control society. Growing social problems and the huge national population have demonstrated that the government can no longer effectively manage society without help from its citizens (Derleth & Koldyk, 2002, p. 12). Consequently, people now find themselves in a period of transition, struggling to learn what it means to be a Chinese citizen rather than a subject and to take more responsibility for their own problems. One example of positive changes occurring in China is the development of neighborhood community groups who serve as ‘self-managing organizations at the grassroots level’ with elected leaders relaying citizens opinions and needs to the government (2002, p. 6). Some leaders partially attribute such attempts to increase local democracy occurring in cities like Benxi to EFL programs which have brought educational advancements and access to literature stressing democratic ideals (Hao, 2005). Kenny (1999, p. 283) also links community empowerment to the value of local education

where people are free to make their own 'informed decisions about the issues that affect them, their problems as they see them, and the ways in which they wish to resolve them'. Across China the teaching of English is interrelated to community development with individuals gaining global ideas and empowerment from other cultures just as the use of language is interrelated to the social relationships and the identities of the users (Graddol, 2006, p. 49).

In an era where the Chinese government is striving to pursue a scientific and systematic approach in their planning strategies toward education there are many opportunities for re-examining the goals of learning English as a global language. Nevertheless, even with more thorough government planning, new technological tools, modern textbooks and methodologies, teachers still remain central to improving English language learning. Teachers are the main decision-makers at the classroom level who shape and modify the English curriculum based on their particular students' needs. Native speaker norms are gradually becoming less relevant as global English lessens the distinction between native speaker, second language speaker and foreign language user. EFL expert Widdowson (1994, p. 377) states that with more non-native English speakers world-wide than native speakers, English is no longer the exclusive property of its native speakers. The spread of English around the world has led to the appearance of new variations of English in different locations as the language changes and develops. The language is also no longer seen as serving the interests of a particular country or promoting specific ideologies, but simply serves global and local needs as a language of wider communication (Gray, 2003, p. 24). The overarching and practical goal for learning EFL is the ability to function and communicate effectively in English with people who live in differing cultural contexts. This new focus places non-native English speaking teachers in the important position of role models for the learners. English speaking Chinese teachers who share the students' linguistic and cultural background can uniquely provide encouragement as having already attained the English skills that the students highly desire (Oka, 2004, p. 4). Additionally, such bilingual instructors are in a good position to take ownership not only of the English language but also of the methods used in their local context in the teaching of EFL. With their knowledge and experience they are

well-equipped to think globally while acting locally in the best interests of building and enhancing their own communities.

EFL programs utilizing native English teachers are generally financially more costly and include the controversial element of bringing imported values into the educational process. Miller (2003, p. 1) believes that values and morals play a significant role in EFL as the teachers interact with their students and curriculum. Foreign teachers may introduce outside elements from their differing backgrounds and frames of reference into the teaching of EFL where even their basic expectations of the students may be tied to cross-cultural or political issues (2003, p. 2). At the foundational level the cognitive skills used to acquire literacy in Chinese are significantly different from those needed in learning spoken English. Rote learning is a standard classroom practice and has value for Chinese learning, whereas English requires a greater degree of analytic and principle-based learning (Graddol, 2006, p. 117). Yet the vastly different communicative task-based language teaching can be an asset with a foreign teacher who effectively uses the opportunity to stretch and broaden the students' minds. Foreign EFL teachers in China often receive a great deal of awe and respect simply because they are so different from local teachers. This can provide opportunities to encourage students to reach beyond prevalent fatalistic attitudes and embrace new possibilities for development in their communities. The ever-present challenge is how to provide educational opportunities for positive social change and greater freedom without forcing colonial or western-style ideals upon the students.

While some criticize any introduction of outside ideas by EFL programs, Dimmock and Walker (2000, p. 302) propose that, 'Globalization makes the recognition of societal culture and cross-cultural similarities and differences more important'. They define globalization as 'the tendency for similar policies and practices to spread across political, cultural and geographical boundaries' where societal culture is the 'enduring sets of values, beliefs and practices that distinguish one group of people from another' (2000, p. 303). The exchange of information and ideas through the medium of English can be positively viewed as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate diversity. Though cultural assimilation is evident across China, traditional culture still permeates social life in many ways. One of the major

cultural standards in China is that the society places more emphasis on the collective good and the influence of relationships rather than on the individualism that is commonly found among Western nations (Da, 2002, p. 21). Chinese culture also remains heavily influenced by hierarchy and seniority in contrast to the West where independence and equality are strongly advocated. The culture of any community indicates the elements that serve to bind that community together. Though values and norms are changing to reflect modern times, China is maintaining strong community bonds and continues to follow a path of change that demonstrates distinctly Chinese characteristics.

Discussion

Luchini (2004, p. 2) states, 'Nowadays, pushed mainly by economic and political needs almost all trades and professions around the world demand people who are able to use a foreign language effectively as an essential tool for establishing meaningful communication, and an essential condition to be able to work in today's global context'. The high priority and large financial outlay for EFL programs in China is generally due to the perceived global importance of English. The exact relationship between the spread and the teaching of English to modern-day globalization is a complex one. Graddol (2006, p. 9) contends that economic globalization encourages the spread of English simultaneously as the spread of English encourages globalization. 'English has at last come of age as a global language. It is a phenomenon which lies at the heart of globalization; English is now redefining national and individual identities world-wide; shifting political fault lines; creating new global patterns of wealth and social exclusion; and suggesting new notions of human rights and responsibilities of citizenship' (2006, p. 12). With English developing as a world language, the field of sociolinguistics is gaining notoriety as it seeks to better understand the relationship between languages and the societal context in which it is used (Holmes, 1997, p. 1). This field of study is highly relevant to the processes of national and community development as well as the local changes being experienced in China today. Knowledge is power, and English is one primary medium for educational advancements in China. Freire (1972, p. 53) in his classic text on education theorizes that, '…liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not

simply transferals of information…' where the goal is to develop the students' ability to critically perceive the world and its changing reality. The trend toward globalization in the 21st century is one part of a changing reality that highlights the importance of English as a global language. For China's development English and community development seem to be entwined with EFL programs serving a number of social functions beyond simply imparting the skill for learners to access relevant knowledge (Hegarty, 2000, p. 451).

Since Deng Xiaoping's economic reform policy of 1979, China has been one of the world's fastest growing economies. China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 is continuing to provide major impetus for reforms, better education and community development initiatives. The widespread economic growth has translated into human development with EFL programs serving to some degree as catalysts in the process. An area for further study involves analyzing and determining the exact degree to which EFL initiatives are contributing to national progress. The ability to assess the benefits of EFL in a standard manner is important, both for future funding and for encouraging further improvements in the Chinese educational system of English teaching. Though the Chinese government once claimed to provide free education to all children, funding constraints in the early 1990s led the central government to shift responsibility for school funding to the provincial governments. This element of decentralization has contributed to some problems for public education and EFL programs in locations where there is a lack of local government emphasis on education. The increasing number of fees and levies charged by public schools has placed a larger financial burden on parents (Free the Children, 2003). Part of this increasing educational cost is tied to the investment in EFL curriculum and the employment of foreign or qualified non-native English teachers who can ensure proper pronunciation and conversational skills in the classroom. The development of a standard assessment tool for local governments would help them to proactively target funds in areas where the most benefit is received and also assist in long-term planning for improving education.

Through a vast range of community development programs, China has seen remarkable increases in longevity, standards of living, and access to health care and education. Since 1979 the economic and social choices of the people have been significantly enlarged. In

many cities decentralization has brought economic freedom closer to the people by giving back the right of decision-making within a market economy environment (Zhang, 2002). With the highly selective, exam-driven public education system, English is critically important for achieving the required test scores for high school and university admission as well as attaining good jobs. Proponents of EFL programs stress that, 'Bilingual education does not simply improve the students oral English…it improves their overall linguistic ability and enables them to think in a second language' (China Education and Research, 2001). Young leaders who have graduated from public and private EFL programs are often better prepared to understand the viewpoints of people around the world and are at the forefront of introducing reform and change into the society at large.

Conclusions and Recommendations

China is experiencing major changes as it shifts from a rural/agricultural to an urban / industrial society and from a centrally-planned to a more globally integrated market-based economy (The World Bank, 2003). In cities where quality EFL programs have been implemented, like Benxi, they are helping to build community capacity, prepare future leaders for a global environment, and spur on national development. Surveys and statistics recording some of the tangible benefits could be developed and improved as an area of further research to benefit local government planning. Basic community development needs are still a pressing issue in China and evaluating exactly how EFL is helping within the process is an ongoing matter with a challenge similar to chasing an ever-moving target.

In both EFL and community development strategies the goal 'is to teach in such a way as to open up possibilities while responding to the community's agenda, rather than to reinforce structures of control or domination …' (Ife, 2002, p. 242). Education and the teaching of English is one means of empowering people within a community so that they have more options available for the future. Within the community, English education programs can raise the awareness level of residents giving them a greater understanding of the nature of citizenship and their responsibility for promoting the good of the community at large. Greater government investment in EFL programs could potentially support the national strategies for

sustainable development as results in Benxi show that they are one important factor in preparing more university graduates to meet the growing needs of rapid development and keeping pace with world technological, economic and social advances. With local government support EFL programs can continue to strengthen and empower local communities by serving as a bridge for introducing new ideas and producing a better educated workforce that is prepared to deal with the changing issues of a global world.

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Developing "The Course" for College Level EFL Learners and Faculty Members in Vietnam

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Key Words: Course Design, Curriculum

Introduction

In November, 2005, I was informed I would be sent for four months to Vinh University, Nghe An Province, Vietnam, as part of the Fulbright visiting lecturer program. Before this point I knew I would be going to Vietnam sometime in the first half of 2005, although I did not know where, nor what I would be teaching, nor precisely when I was to start. What happens when the teacher/course designer needs to create courses for learners in a context remote from her experience, and in a situation in which knowledge in advance is confused or nonexistent? When the courses are to be taught in an impoverished region in a developing country where resources thought to be basic to many educators in developed countries, such as a selection of textbooks, bookstores, computers and computer printers, copy machines, overhead projectors, and timely mail service, are not readily available? This is a report of what happened in just this situation.

Preparing for Departure

Learning where I would be sent did not necessarily answer the question of what I would teach. I was the first Fulbright person to be sent to Vinh University, although the university had

been hosting volunteer native English speaking teachers sent by a Christian organization for several years. While I had lived in the Philippines and Japan, and had taught for many years in Japan, I had never visited Vietnam, nor had I met many Vietnamese English language learners. In the course of researching educational cultures and language development of international teaching assistants (ITAs) in the U.S. (there were two Vietnamese graduate students in an ITA program I worked in), I had done some reading on the history of Vietnamese education (e.g., Dao, Thiep, & Sloper, 1995). I learned that Vietnamese higher education was strongly influenced by remnants of French colonialism, that schools were under central governmental control, that opportunities for higher education were largely limited to Vietnamese under the age of 25, and that Russian and French language study had given way somewhat to English language study in recent times.

E-mail correspondence with Fulbright officials in Washington, D.C., and Hanoi, and with various officials at Vinh University, did not clarify issues of what I should teach, what materials I should bring with me, what students' levels or needs were, nor what was available in terms of equipment or other teaching resources such as blackboards, chalk, or computer printers. On one hand, Fulbright officials in Washington stated I would be teaching teacher education courses and that I should not consider myself to be a rank and file English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher. Fulbright officials in Hanoi emphasized that I should "make a lasting difference" at the school and help to bring material changes in teaching methodologies there. And, one real need at the school was to hold an English development course for staff in the International Relations office and faculty members in various departments who wished to study abroad, particularly in Korea, where they would have to pass English tests in order to be eligible for a scholarship there. I should also hold seminars for faculty members on curriculum, testing, or research methods on a monthly basis. While in theory this sounded fine, I had no information on the proficiency of the students for the English development course, nor for type of proficiency (written word versus grammatical knowledge versus communicative competence) for the faculty members, for that matter.

Correspondence with various parties at Vinh University was equally confusing. Could I teach five EFL *classes* for the undergraduate students? They want to be English teachers.

These could be reading, speaking, listening, or writing classes. Could I teach seven *periods*? A period is 45 minutes long. We also need a language development course for new teachers to meet from 7 to 10 AM. We need TOEFL or IATEFL preparation classes for our staff, could you teach that at night? In the midst of this, I was urged by the Washington Fulbright people to put together whatever books, tapes, or other materials I wished to use (including class textbooks), pack them into a maximum of four boxes, each of which must weigh less than 40 pounds and measure less than a combined 72 inches (height by width by depth), and do it *quickly* because the boxes would take a minimum of three weeks to arrive, even by diplomatic pouch. I came to understand several things: First, I was not going to get sufficient contextual information before my departure; Second, what and who I would teach would likely be an issue of confusion and negotiation even after my arrival; and Third, I had better have a plan about what I would do regardless of what or who I was asked to teach once I arrived.

Knowing the Context

Curriculum writers in TESOL rightly point out the importance of investigating the context in which new courses will be developed (Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001; Woodward, 2001). Material and human resources, learner ability, as well as institutional, collegial, and learner perceptions of need, constrain what a teacher/course designer can do. Great ideas about courses in which language learners exchange videotaped diaries will not go far in a context where video technologies are not available, the students are complete beginners who do not feel the need to talk, the school is accustomed to book-based language practice, and the colleagues believe teacher-to-whole class instruction is most suitable. While many teachers develop courses at an informal level without much preparation (as when they are assigned to teach a course new to them, or they change jobs), most language educators would hesitate to formally develop a full blown course with no knowledge of the students or institution. Developing goals, objectives, lesson plans, and materials is time consuming, and what if all of it is wrong for the learners, the facilities, the institution?

One Solution: Knowing my Assumptions

In situations like the one described above, I think teachers are thrown back upon their only, and best, resource—themselves. Based on this, I considered my core beliefs of how language learning is accomplished and what I felt I could do, at base level, with only a few reference books and one or two class textbook sets at my disposal. In essence, I defined "the course," an action-based core set of beliefs, an agenda, that I would take to a new and temporary teaching context. While I will describe these beliefs in detail below, I will state them briefly here: I believe that the L2 should be used maximally in the classroom, particularly by the learners taking on positions of holders of critical classroom information, for the purpose of increasing fluency. By "critical classroom information" I mean information necessary to the functioning of the class, such as giving directions, putting students into groups or pairs, taking roll, or expanding on utterances I or learners themselves make. I believe that learners should be able to formulate their own language learning goals and should be able to name and use strategies to support those goals. I believe that language learners need to learn features of sociolinguistic and textual knowledge. In other words, I think learners should learn to use language appropriate for some social situations, and that learners should know that conversations and other kinds of communication do tend to follow certain "scripts" in different cultures and can be expressed in a range of forms. Finally, I believe that learners need to learn the role of content schemas (the "scripts" and forms mentioned above) in comprehending and creating English messages, and learn how to use introspective techniques to access and develop those schemas. As might be guessed, my orientation is towards teaching adults who are not complete beginners. But I felt fairly confident I would not be asked to teach young children while in Vietnam.

After Arrival: The Curricular Context

The geographic and institutional context

Vinh University, founded in 1959, is located in Vinh City, a city of 200,000 on the southern edge of Nghe An Province. The city faces the Tonkin Gulf approximately 200 kilometers south of Hanoi. Nghe An Province has long been one of the most impoverished provinces in

Vietnam (Florence & Jealous, 2003). Vinh City is the capital, and has been experiencing some recent economic development, but is not accessible to Hanoi except by a six hour night train, bus, or car ride. There are only a handful of foreigners in the region, and the sight of a foreigner on the street and on campus is an object of curiosity and comment.

Vinh University is one of the poorest public universities in Vietnam (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005). It was founded as a teacher's college, and continues in this tradition, offering a full range of academic subjects, such as physics, chemistry, political science, forestry, computer technology, and foreign language for the benefit of future elementary and secondary education teachers and their students (Nghe An Provincial Government, 2005). In 2001-2002, it enrolled 15,000 students in undergraduate and graduate programs (Nghe An Provincial Government, 2005). Many students are from Nghe An Province, and will stay in the area once they graduate, sometimes teaching in very rural settings (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005). The university is making great strides in building itself up through new construction projects through the auspices of the World Bank (T. Tung, personal communication, March 1, 2005). Yet classrooms continue to be overcrowded and outmoded, and 1950s era equipment is not being replaced, particularly in the science related departments (T. Tran, personal communication, March 2, 2005). Departments do not generally have photocopiers and most teachers make copies at their own expense at one of the many one-room photocopy shops near the campus. Very few individuals own computers or have Internet access on household telephone lines, but in recent years literally hundreds of reasonably priced Internet cafes have opened near the campus and are jammed with students. Teachers go there to check their own e-mail accounts (T. Tran, personal communication, March 2, 2005). Western textbooks, audio tapes and CDs, computer programs, and other instructional media taken for granted by many educators in more developed nations are generally out of reach, both in price and availability, for most departments, faculty members, and students (T. Tran and N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005).

The International Relations Office

The International Relations Office at the university undertakes a number of essential functions, including writing grant proposals for World Bank grants and administering those funds for major construction and equipage programs. The office is responsible for interacting with the Vietnamese government to get visas for all of the foreign teachers (English and French speaking) and students at the university (there are students from Laos, Cambodia, Korea, and Thailand). The director makes frequent visits to universities in other Southeast Asian countries to forge relationships with them. It is the International Relations Office that initiated the quest for a visiting Fulbright lecturer. One of their aims was for the Fulbrighter to teach an English enrichment course for faculty members in all departments (biology, technology, and forestry, for example) who aspire to graduate study overseas in Korea, Thailand, and the U.S. This group of students will be described below.

The Foreign Languages College and English Program

Despite this seeming geographic and academic isolation, the Foreign Languages College of Vinh University has made sustained efforts to provide future and current foreign language teachers with a strong basis in language skills, linguistic theory, and teaching methodology. Founded ten years ago, it is one of the newer departments at the university (H. Vu, personal communication, March 10, 2005). It maintains programs in English, French, Chinese, and Russian and employs over 60 full time faculty members (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005). In the English program alone, there are four major areas of study: literature/translation, linguistics, methodology, and practical skills (interpreter training). Students must take courses in all four concentrations. Besides skills courses offered in all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), courses in semantics, discourse analysis, phonetics and phonology, and methodology are required for undergraduate students in the program (T. Tran, personal communication, February 20, 2005). 80-90 students graduate from this program per year. Most become teachers in primary or secondary education while a few are hired by the department to teach at the university, and 10% become interpreters (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005). Students with high grades

are strongly encouraged to seek graduate education in Hanoi and receive material help from the Science Committee at the university, whose recommendation is a prerequisite to graduate study in Vietnam. According to the dean, the course offerings are as broad as they are due to sustained efforts on the part of the dean and "young" faculty members to improve the quality of the program and the general level of faculty members' professional qualifications (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005). Faculty salaries are very low (U.S. $40 to $60 per month), however, and most faculty members must teach private classes in order to make ends meet. Graduate study, even in Vietnam, remains an elusive goal for that reason. There is a language lab and a department specific library, with a full time librarian, with reference books for students to write their theses, and proposals have been made to the university president to create a multimedia room (N. Phuong, personal communication, March 2, 2005).

The classroom context

Despite these improvements and efforts, the physical condition of the facilities, equipment, and materials remains poor. Classrooms are not heated or cooled (although in some of the newer rooms there are ceiling fans) and with concrete floors and walls, and with doors facing the open outdoors where students congregate, are incredibly noisy. Older classrooms are poorly lit with bare lightbulbs hanging from the ceiling. Students sit on heavy wooden benches behind wooden tables which are crowded into the classrooms, making task work calling for students to move around the room difficult. Many electrical outlets do not work. Tape and video players often do not work or are not available (M. Schott, and H. Vu, personal communications, March 10, 2005). Original versions of reference books, textbooks, audio tapes and CDs are not available and out of the financial reach of faculty members and students alike. The library is not well stocked, and students lack the materials they need in order to write theses (T. Tran, personal communication, March 2, 2005). Faculty members must travel at their own expense to other universities six or more hours away to use their libraries to find and digest teaching ideas, books, and textbooks (H. Vu, personal communication, March 2, 2005).

The undergraduate students

Despite these physical difficulties, the undergraduate students seem to know quite a bit (they know about "schema," for example) and seem willing to engage in conversations and communicate in English. Higher level students stay after class and ask questions about methodology, and phone or e-mail with cogent requests and questions. On the basis of a placement test administered in their first year, students are placed into three different levels: A (the highest), B, and E (the lowest). They are assigned to a class in which they remain for their entire undergraduate career, such as 43 A2 (my class), which means they matriculated in the 43rd year after the founding of the university (they are juniors), are level A, and are group two within level A. Classes have an average of 30 students. Most are female, with five to six males. In 43A2 (and in one other comparable class I have become acquainted with), knowledge and skill level varies considerably (for example, in one reading task, some students read a 500 word passage in three minutes, while others took eight to nine minutes). This variation in ability is not at first apparent. Classes seem to operate collectively in the sense that if one student does not understand a request or instructions in English, class members stronger in English intervene and explain in Vietnamese, seamlessly, quietly, and quickly. This has been noted in other university teaching settings in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2005; Noseworthy, 2005). The general energy level and camaraderie of the students as a group is very high, which translates into much noise and activity, and so in teacher-to-whole-group communication contexts, it is very easy for weaker, non-comprehending students to fade into the background. As one colleague put it, they are like a "school of fish," responding and turning and moving en masse. Because of long, crowded rows of tables and benches, it is difficult for the teacher to access pairs or groups of students who are engaged in communicative tasks to hear what students are capable of and to offer feedback (M. Schott, personal communication, March 10, 2005).

The faculty/students

As mentioned above, the International Relations Office sponsored an English enrichment/test preparation course for faculty members in all departments desiring to apply

for graduate study abroad. By common consent, the class meets twice a week, 90 minutes each time from 7 to 8:30 PM. At the initial class meeting, 21 class members enrolled. Within weeks, the number of students actually attending has dropped to 15. Ten are men and five are women, in their 20s and 30s. All are full time faculty members at the university, teaching in departments such as information technology, economics, mathematics, biology, and civil engineering. All have at least a B.A. and some have worked in industry or for non-governmental organizations before taking up an academic career. As with the undergraduate students, there is great variation in English knowledge and skill level, although all class members habitually read technical and research reports in their fields in English. The students, being older, are quieter and yet are very persistent in engaging in English conversations with each other and with me. They have more latent knowledge of technical and academic vocabulary than the undergraduates but cannot pronounce the words or use them in conversations.

Designing and Evaluating "the Course"

Before arriving in Vietnam, articulating the core beliefs set out above was a major, yet only initial step. In order to decide what books, tapes, etc. to send ahead, and to be optimally functional and purposive upon arrival, I needed to spell out "the course" further in the form of goals that would support objectives that would in turn support the generation of lesson plans, and materials and task ideas. I also found I needed to specify general skill areas that seemed most congruent with my belief that fluency building was my main business. I believed that learners who wish to be English teachers, or who are preparing to take tests to study abroad probably had some knowledge of English grammatical forms and vocabulary but may have limited ability to use that knowledge communicatively. That suggested I should focus on speaking. At the same time, I had a continuing research interest in reading fluency development in EFL contexts (Taguchi & Gorsuch, 2002; Taguchi, Takayasu-Maas, & Gorsuch, 2004), and I wanted to be able to work in two skills areas to increase my flexibility upon arrival. I therefore focused on reading and speaking. I reasoned that these were two skills areas mentioned in e-mails from university personnel, and regardless of what

I would be asked to teach after I arrived, reading and speaking could be used for fluency building, and could be used as springboards for skills development in listening or writing if need be.

To develop the goals and objectives, and to begin the process of materials selection, I wrote down my core beliefs as four goals, which I stated fairly broadly. I mean broad in two senses. First, the goals were broad in content, meaning they could be applied to both reading and speaking skills areas. For example the goal of fluency development is equally applicable to reading and speaking. Second, the goals were broad in that they incorporated the notion of language learning as processes (fluency development, development of awareness of language as having rhetorical organization) but did not specify at what point learners were or should be in these processes (because I did not know how fluent the students were, nor whether anyone had spoken to them about rhetorical patterns in language before). At this point, the goals appeared more like statements of my own intentions or what I considered to be "optimal states" in a classroom, than the more learner focused statements which are found in Table 2 below.

For the next step, I tested the goals in terms of their applicability to both reading and speaking by writing objectives for them onto a sheet split into two columns, one for reading and one for speaking. I reasoned that if I could not write objectives for both skill areas, then the goal was not useful for me. Like the goals, the objectives seemed more like phrases or statements of intention which held images for me as to what learners should be doing, or seeing, or processing in classes. For example (see Table 1 below):

Table 1

Sample goal and objectives, V.1

Goal: Plans for life long learning: Identification of goals, resources, purposes for learning
<u>Reading</u>
Defining purposes for reading
Identifying sources of L2 reading materials in Vietnam
Identifying interests and needs that can be met through reading

Speaking

Defining goals for speaking

Identifying supports for speaking goals (students supply scenarios, situations, scripts)

I set these first goals and objectives statements aside for a few days and then returned to it, collapsing some objectives into a single objective and dropping others. I was pleased to see that all four goals held up to my test criteria of being able to support the writing of objectives in both reading and speaking. This process resulted in a second version of my goals and objectives which I again set aside for a few days. I then tested this second set of goals and objectives afresh by asking myself whether I could use them to select materials to send to myself in Vietnam, and whether I could write a lesson plan each for reading and speaking. Looking at the four goals and the objectives for the two skills areas suggested a number of materials I ought to gather, for example (see Table 2 below):

Table 2

Partial materials list suggested by V.2 of goals and objectives

Materials	Basis in V.2 of goals, objectives
60 copies of *The University Daily* (the student newspaper of Texas Tech University	Goal: Maximal engagement in L2 output, input Objective: Reading for various purposes (skimming, close reading)
50 cards of recipes from the local supermarket	Goal: Communicative competence: focus on social roles, rhetorical organization of texts Objective: description, narration,

	Cause and effect, processes, persuasion in reading texts
22 copies of *Towards Speaking Excellence* (Papajohn, 1998) 40 copies of the *SPEAK Practice Test* (Educational Testing Service, 1996) including two audio tapes	Goal: Schema activation, expansion Objective: Schema activation for interviews, monologic talks, teaching sessions Goal: Communicative competence: Focus on social roles, rhetorical organization of texts Objective: Social roles as related to pronunciation (intonation), language choices Objective: Communicative functions such as persuading, inviting, arguing a point

For those who are not familiar with the *SPEAK*® test, this is a set of retired versions of the *Test of Spoken English*®, produced by Educational Testing Service (ETS)(makers of the TOEFL®). This is a 12-item performance test commonly used as institution-specific tests in U.S. universities to assess international students' ability to communicate orally. Each of the 12 items on any of the *SPEAK* tests and the *SPEAK Practice Test* capture a speakers' ability to engage in a brief monologic talk by narrating a series of pictures, or persuading a ticket seller or dry cleaner to render some special service, or describing changes in a schedule for a specific group of people. In retrospect, I did not set out intending to prepare any group of students to take the *SPEAK* test. In fact, I dislike the idea of any course which meets solely to prepare students for tests—they seem to push students into focusing on the wrong priorities. However, the excellent practice materials afforded by the

SPEAK test and the strong theoretical basis of the *SPEAK* in current models of communicative competence, made these materials appropriate for some of my goals and objectives for speaking.

Based on my provisional goals and objectives, and the resulting list of materials they seemed to suggest, I realized that I still did not know how many students would be in a class, nor how many classes I would teach, so I guessed at the number, reasoning that if I had two classes of 30 or more students (in this case, 22 or 40 books would not be enough) I could use the books or other materials as class sets, with the two (or more) groups of students using them only during class time and in essence sharing them. I could then donate the class sets to the university when it came time for me to leave. To complete my test of the second version of my goals and objectives, I wrote two sample lesson plans, one for speaking and one for reading. By consulting my goals and objectives while planning sequences of specific activities and tasks, I found that I could write what seemed like focused lesson plans which integrated all of the goals at one time of another.

Finally, I rewrote my goals and objectives into a format I associate with more formal goals and objectives, which involves orienting statements of teacher intention or intuition into what students will do in classrooms. This third version of the goals and objectives, which I now use while teaching in Vietnam, appears in Table 3 below:

Table 3

"The Course" Key Elements V.3

Goal: Learners will use the L2 maximally in the classroom for the purpose of increasing fluency. Knowledge, attitude.

Reading course

Objective: Learners will read at least one graded reader appropriate for their level using the repeated reading method.

Objective: Learners will read an appropriate number of graded readers of their choice appropriate for their level and be able to retell the stories at a basic level.

Objective: Learners will learn two methods for learning new vocabulary they encounter in graded readers: Repetition and key word. *English grapheme training? As needed? Preemptive? On what basis?*

Speaking course

Objective: Learners will be accustomed to speaking to each other in the L2 through pair, group, and whole class work.

Objective: Learners will engage in brief monologic talks, first based on outlines they will formulate and later without outlines.

Objective: Learners will use the L2 as sources of critical information in the classroom (calling the roll, giving and receiving their classmates' instructions, presenting information their classmates need to know).

Objective: Learners will learn word stress and sentence stress of American English pronunciation through listening and speaking tasks, as a means of language practice.

Goal: Learners will be able to formulate their language learning goals and name at least three strategies for meeting those goals.

Reading course

Objective: Learners will articulate purposes they have for reading L1 and L2 texts.

Objective: Learners will be able to identify different modes of reading: skimming, scanning, and careful reading for global comprehension and engage in tasks to promote differential reading behavior for different purposes. *Moved here from first goal (goal on fluency).*

Objective: Learners will create personal lists of L1 and L2 texts useful to them.

Objective: Learners will articulate language learning needs and interests, match them to their list of L2 text sources, and then evaluate the match.

Speaking course

Objective: Learners will articulate goals for L2 speaking in terms of where, why, and with whom.

Objective: Learners will create scenarios and situations in which they would like to use English, and then develop outlines and scripts for them.

Goal: Learners will, through classroom practice, learn features of sociolinguistic knowledge and textual (conversational and rhetorical organizational) knowledge.

Reading

Objective: Learners will be able to identify specific features of rhetorical patterns found in graded readers, possibly including: description, narration, cause and effect, comparisons/contrasts, processes, persuasion, expressing opinions.

Objective: Learners will be able to identify sociolinguistic features which define social roles of characters and author purposes in narratives.

Speaking

Objective: Learners will identify and use features of rhetorical organization and communicative functions in SPEAK test tasks, including: description, narration, cause and effect, comparisons/contrasts, processes, persuasion, expressing opinions.

Objective: Learners will be able to identify features of rhetorical organization in L1 and L2 interviews and use them in interview tasks in the classroom.

Objective: Learners will identify and use features of rhetorical organization and communicative functions need to manage basic, brief classroom sessions.

Goal: Learners will, through classroom practice, the role of content schema in comprehending and creating messages, and will be able to use mind mapping and other introspective techniques to articulate these schema.

Reading course

Objective: Before reading graded readers, learners will do mind mapping and other introspective schema activation tasks in class, and do one on their own.

Objective: After reading graded readers, learners will return to mind mapping and other introspective schema activation tasks done in class, and add or revise information.

Objective: Learners will create provisional hypotheses for aspects of culture they are not familiar with in graded readers.

Speaking course

Objective: Learners will use mindmapping and other introspective schema activation tasks in pair and small groups to active schema for SPEAK test tasks, teaching sessions, and interviews.

Objective: Learners will create provisional hypotheses for aspects of SPEAK test tasks they are not familiar with.

Setbacks and Successes

It is remarkable that given my lack of knowledge of the context, and the realities of the context as it unfolded after my arrival, that “the course” has largely held up. It has held up

in the sense that I actively use the goals and objectives resulting from my thoughts on "the course" to plan lessons, devise in-class and at-home assignments, and select and create materials on a daily basis. Articulating, codifying, and using my goals and objectives has allowed me to maintain a sense of purpose and coherence in a situation where it would otherwise be difficult to do so.

Setbacks: Slow mail; perceptual mismatches; location, location, location

When I arrived at Vinh, I found that only two out of four boxes of materials had arrived. This meant I had at my disposal a set of 60 university newspapers, a few copies of SPEAK test practice tests, one copy each of two graded readers I planned to use, *A Scandal in Bohemia* (Doyle, retold by Holt, 1996) and *Strangers on a Train* (Highsmith, retold by Nation, 1995), a few reference books I had brought, including *Clear Speech* (Gilbert, 1993) and *English L2 Reading* (Birch, 2002), and one copy each of four reading comprehension tests I had developed in the weeks before my departure. Other boxes (two I had sent to myself and two from a research colleague in Japan) did not arrive for two to three weeks and I was not fully "equipped" with all of the materials I had selected for use until four weeks after my arrival. However, because the goals and objectives for "the course" were not centered on any specific materials, I was able to plan lessons using what materials I had. For the undergraduate students, I used the university newspapers to begin working with them on learning new vocabulary learning strategies (reading), to highlight the contrasts between skimming and careful reading, to introduce and use clarification requests to use in pair tasks (speaking), to introduce students to newspapers as having specific kinds of rhetorical organization (reading), and to encourage sustained silent reading. For the faculty/student class, *SPEAK* practice tests could be used to introduce rhetorical organization of specific kinds of communicative events, such as persuading someone to clean a suit within 24 hours (speaking). The same material was used to guide the faculty members to using introspective techniques on developing schema for responding to the kinds of items found on the *SPEAK* test, and for other communicative events that suggested themselves from class discussions on communicative events, such as how introductions

might be done in Vietnam and the United States (speaking). This introspection proved effective with the faculty members, as they were older, had had more experience in the world and society, and could articulate how they thought, or did not think, certain communicative events might unfold.

The fact that I did not have at first class sets of many of the materials I planned to use did not matter because one of the speaking objectives stipulated that learners be sources of critical information for each other. Specific tasks and extracts from the materials on hand were written on the board by pairs of students from both classes communicating the tasks and texts to each other from the printed source. As the teams rotated on and off, and as the rest of the class watched the material emerge on the blackboard, the use of clarification requests became much more prevalent, as all class members wanted to ensure that they understood the material on the board and that the information was accurate. As I became more mobile in the community, I was also able to locate locally available materials that could be used to help students achieve the goals and objectives, such as *Clear Speech from the Start* (Gilbert, 2001) which had been reprinted and distributed by a Vietnam-based publisher, thus putting the book into the financial reach of students (cost = U.S. 90 cents). This particular book had very helpful sections not only for speaking, but for helping undergraduate students sound out English words while reading (p. 8, p. 20). For faculty members it was useful in helping them realize which words they wished to emphasize in their monologic responses to the SPEAK test and in communicative pair tasks.

"The course" proved particularly helpful just after my arrival when it became clear that a host of mismatched perceptions about my purpose for being there was at play. As in Japanese universities, foreign teachers at Vinh University are often relegated to teaching undergraduate speaking classes, while reading and writing classes, used to teach grammar, are assigned to Vietnamese teachers.

With my goals and objectives in hand, I was able to negotiate a clear position for myself by relating both speaking *and* reading to fluency building during my discussions with foreign language department officials. Because I had ordered graded readers and developed tests on the basis of my goals and objectives, and because I planned to donate

whole class sets (40 books each) of two readers, plus accompanying audio tapes and tests that I had developed using texts at the same level as the graded readers, my position was more convincing. I was able to say "I am not prepared to teach multiple speaking classes for undergraduate students, but I am prepared to teach speaking and reading fluency development, which are closely aligned and furthermore I have the materials with which to do that" (I did not mention that nothing had arrived yet). At the same time I was able to fulfill my mandate from the Fulbright Commission, which was to introduce change in way language education was accomplished. To date, three Vietnamese teachers have observed my undergraduate speaking and reading fluency classes, and two others have joined in a research project on reading fluency that I am carrying out with a Japanese colleague. Four students from another undergraduate class have expressed interest in reading fluency methodology, and we have begun weekly sessions in which we engage in reading fluency tasks and then discuss the texts and the methodology in English.

Students in my undergraduate class questioned why they were reading during a "speaking" class. Through a situation analysis I carried out (interviews with teachers, students, and business leaders, and document retrieval) I learned that in speaking classes Vietnamese undergraduates are used to being given a topic, discussing the topic in small groups (probably mostly in their L1s), and having one group member (the one with the strongest L2) give a presentation. While one half of the class (45 minutes) was spent on silent sustained reading, the other half (45 minutes) was spent on communicative tasks which involved students working in pairs to identify unknown words or to make predictions about the next part of the story or to identify specific rhetorical features, and roleplaying any character dialog within the text according to suprasegmental features of English introduced earlier. However, students did not see these tasks, in which they used the L2 as "speaking" because it did not fit their preconceptions of how English speaking was accomplished in the classroom. This remains an issue in students' minds, according to a formative evaluation survey done recently. However, a few students have noted on the evaluation forms that they believe the reading fluency sessions helps their pronunciation (at different times, the text being read is read aloud to the class members at the same time they

read the assigned passage). This may be one bridge between reading and speaking fluency I can build on for the remainder of my stay in Vinh.

The location of my undergraduate reading/speaking class changed for every class meeting in the first month. I would go to the classroom pointed out by the departmental secretary only to find that another class was in there, taking an exam. I used different means to find my students (who always seemed to know where to go) such as asking a teacher to telephone a student in the class who had a mobile phone to find out where they were. This cut into classtime, sometimes in serious ways, and also had the effect of changing the conditions in which I had to teach. Some classrooms would have sufficient light, a decent blackboard, and a working electrical outlet (for a tape player) while other classrooms would not. But the fact was that under optimum conditions, I could meet with the undergraduate students for 90 minutes twice a week. It was a challenge to integrate all of the goals and objectives I had articulated into that time frame, and nearly impossible when confusion over the location of the class made further cuts into that time. This underlines a flaw in "the course" which I will discuss below in the evaluation section.

Successes

I was very fortunate that "the course" coincided in several important ways with the needs of the undergraduate and faculty students. In other words, without my knowing it beforehand, "the course" was a fair fit for the context. The undergraduate students really did need help in developing reading fluency. In post-reading, twice-weekly reports, students repeatedly state how much more confident they feel reading English books, and how excited they are to have visible proof that their reading speed is increasing (each student uses a stop watch). The students and the departmental library was also in desperate need of pleasure reading materials, indeed, any English reading materials, a theme that emerged again and again in interviews for a situation analysis with foreign and Vietnamese teachers, the students, and the foreign language college dean. "The course" has now provided the department with two 40 copy sets of graded readers, plus audio tapes, plus time keeping charts, plus four comprehension tests for their exclusive use. In addition, without telling me, Etsuo Taguchi,

my Japanese research partner at Daito Bunka University, donated his entire personal graded reader collection of over 100 titles to the department. The readers are now being cataloged and prepared for student use in the departmental library.

For the faculty member class, using the *SPEAK* test materials, including the book by Dean Papajohn (1998), proved very motivating. Many items in the practice tests and tasks in Papajohn's book were useful for exploring the rhetorical organization of many communicative events, and showing the benefits of advance planning and knowledge of schema for foreign language users. Even though most of the classroom tasks were not directly related to the *SPEAK* test (e.g., practice with suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation, group discussions on differences between Vietnamese and American university education, roleplays based on schema building tasks), the faculty members stated repeatedly that they felt these tasks would help them get better scores on the *SPEAK* test which would materially assist them during graduate study.

Evaluation

I evaluated "the course" using a daily post-class-meeting log, formative evaluation questionnaires, and information from a situation analysis. Limitations of space prevent a full reporting of all of the evaluation materials. Only the results from the formative evaluation questionnaires will be reported here, and only a few of the quantitative results will be commented on. Midway through the semester I administered three questionnaires, two for the undergraduate students, and one for the faculty members. I dealt with reading and speaking skills separately for the undergraduates and the items and results appear in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4

*Results from undergraduate reading formative evaluation questionnaire (*N = *29)*

	M	*SD*	Mode	Min/Max
Reading part of a book five times is helpful.	4.214	.787	5	1/5
Techniques we have learned on how to learn words have been useful.	3.928	1.105	4	1/5
I think my reading speed is getting faster.	4.321	.475	4	4/5
I can comprehend when I read fast.	3.785	.917	4	1/5
This class is the same as what we do in other reading classes.	2.285	.896	2	1/5
It helps me to think about my purpose for reading something.	3.857	1.007	4	1/5
When I know my purpose for reading I change the way I read.	4.071	.939	4	1/5
Reading is an important part of learning English.	4.535	.838	5	1/5
Reading stories in English helps me learn about culture.	4.250	.585	4	3/5

For each questionnaire item, students were invited to respond with their level of agreement to the statements in Table 4 above. A response of 1 = “strongly disagree” while a response of 5 = “strongly agree.” A higher mean would mean a higher level of agreement with a statement. The undergraduate students seem to agree that the reading fluency teachniques used in the class are useful (*M* = 4.214, Mode (the most commonly occurring response) = 5) and that their reading fluency is increasing (*M* = 4.321, Mode = 4). Tellingly, students note that other reading classes they have had are different than the reading classes generated by “the course” (*M* = 2.285, Mode = 2). In general, the results noted above reflect positively on reading portion of “the course” and it’s goals and objectives. However, some results suggest problems which might require revision. For example, students only somewhat agree that vocabulary learning techniques that have been introduced are useful (*M* = 3.928, Mode = 4). A check of the daily research log suggests that the techniques have not been touched on in class that often, suggesting a possible need to refer to the techniques

more in class, and invite more direct evaluation of the techniques while they are being used in and out of class. This also underscores the notion mentioned above that there are too many objectives in "the course" to integrate easily into the time available for class meetings. Students only somewhat agree that when they read fast, they can comprehend (*M* = 3.785, Mode = 4). This is troubling, suggesting that students, while feeling good about their reading fluency increasing, are uncomfortable with the idea that they cannot read slowly and for accuracy, which is what some have reported is what is required of them to do well on tests and in other classes in the program. Perhaps more class time can be spent in pair or group discussions in which students can discuss areas of non-comprehension in the texts.

Table 5

*Results from undergraduate speaking formative evaluation questionnaire (*N = *29)*

	M	*SD*	Mode	Min/Max
I am willing to speak English in class.	4.315	.749	5	3/5
I feel my classmates give me enough time to think and speak.	3.947	.848	4	2/5
I feel Dr. Gorsuch gives me enough time to think and speak.	4.105	.657	4	2/5
The teacher allows us time to use English in class.	4.421	.507	4	4/5
Talking with a partner in English class helps me.	4.731	.452	5	4/5
Talking with a small group in English class helps me.	4.421	.606	4	3/5
Giving my classmates instructions in English helps me.	3.947	.621	4	3/5
I can teach a class for junior or senior high school students using English.	4.000	.745	4	3/5

Students strongly agreed that they are willing to speak in class (*M* = 4.315, Mode = 5), that I allowed them time to use English English in class (*M* = 4.421, Mode = 4), and that pair and small group work was useful for them in class (*M* = 4.731, Mode = 4; *M* = 4.421, Mode = 5). I was sensitive to students' comments that they wanted to do more speaking in class,

hence the items focused on speaking time in class. The quantitative results suggest that students do feel they have enough time to speak in class. Yet in written comments made by students on the questionnaire, the theme of wanting more speaking time persists. Fortunately, the comments also offer insights into why students may feel this way:

> -For speaking class, working in group is better than in individual.
> -We need more games that we can play in class to use English more often.
> -Need more time to speak English in class. Play interesting games. Make role play.
> -I hope teacher can give us some methods and create and active atmosphere in classroom.

For these students, "speaking" in classes is best accomplished in groups (see notes above on how Vietnamese teachers teach speaking), and playing games. One student's use of the term "methods" provides a clue about the role of games in Vietnamese foreign language classrooms. The term "methods" is used by my colleagues and other teacher trainers to mean "technique" or "game." In a seminar given by a Canadian teacher's organization during the semester at Vinh University, all presentations introduced games which called for the whole group of participants to move around the class, talking to as many people as possible on topics that were "fun" like "romance," "the best mate for you," etc. The noise and activity levels were high, not much like the paired and grouped communicative tasks I had been asking the undergraduates to do, which called for rather more subdued and detailed talk about predictions students had about the upcoming reading, for example. One interpretation of students' comments is they wanted more "fun" topics and wanted to talk with more people in the class. In short, they had social needs that were closely entwined with their perceptions of how speaking was accomplished in classes. Their comments may alse be a reflection that they wanted to learn games they might be able to use with high school students when they themselves became teachers. Based on other comments made on the reading questionnaire, some revisions I might make are to

create tasks in which students must consult more than one speaking partner (although in those crowded classrooms this might be difficult), and in which we might focus on conflicts between characters, or their personalities, or roleplay their repartee, or ask and answer questions about points of the story students do not feel they fully understand.

For results of the faculty class questionnaire, see Table 6 below:

Table 6

*Results from the faculty class formative evaluation questionnaire (*N *=15)*

	M	*SD*	Mode	Min/Max
I am willing to speak English in class.	4.25	1.388	5	1/5
I feel my classmates give me enough time to think and speak.	3.875	.991	4	2/5
I feel Dr. Gorsuch gives me enough time to think and speak.	4.125	.353	4	4/5
The teacher allows us time to use English in class.	4.125	1.35	5	1/5
Talking with a partner in English class helps me.	4.375	.517	4	4/5
Talking with a small group in English class helps me.	3.875	1.246	4	1/5
Giving my classmates instructions in English helps me.	4.125	.353	4	3/5
Learning word stress helps me.	4.375	1.407	5	1/5
Figuring out what to do with my English speaking skills in my life is useful.	4.125	.353	4	4/5
Writing scripts for using English in specific situations is useful.	4.125	.640	4	3/5
Learning different kinds of sentences in the SPEAK test is useful.	4.00	1.309	4	1/5

Results for some items underscore differences beween the undergraduate and faculty classes, both in terms of differences in learning styles and needs of students, and in terms of how different aspects of “the course” have become emphasized in the undergraduate and faculty classes. The adult students seem to prefer talking in pairs much more than talking in

groups (M = 4.375 as opposed to M = 3.875). I had noted early on in my log that the class seemed most energetic when they had chances to talk in pairs, particularly if they were paired in male/female dyads. Energy was an issue, in that the class met at night, after class members had had a long day of teaching. In contrast with the undergraduate students, the faculty members' social needs seemed more in tune with pair work. Faculty members seem content with the amount of speaking done in the class, which underscores the fact that more time is devoted to speaking in the faculty class when compared to the undergraduate class. I emphasize the reading fluency component more in the undergraduate class, although never for more than one half of the 90 minute class meeting. While undergraduates and faculty members may engage in very similar kinds of communicative tasks in pairs and groups, the undergraduate students are more engaged in tasks related to the reading materials suggested by "the course." I suggest that in the first weeks of my stay at Vinh University, it became apparent to me that the needs and strengths of the undergraduates and the faculty members were quite different. So, while "the course" is still held together by common goals and objectives, I have emphasized parts of it in one class and de-emphasized other parts in another class.

Time Frame for "The Course"

The curriculum is taking place over the course of the spring, 2005 semester at Vinh University, which runs from February 21 to June 10. Accounting in one week for Reunification Day/Worker Day holidays and one week for examination, this results in 15 weeks of classes for the faculty members (30 class meetings), and 13 weeks for the undergraduates (26 class meetings). Undergraduates have two fewer weeks due to a practice teaching unit they must complete in high schools scatttered throughout the province. Because the goals and objectives of "the course" focus on what I believe are optimal states of learning in classes and not strongly related to any one textbook or body of content, there are no specifications as to how much material is to be covered.

Materials and Assessments

Assessements, which are ongoing, follow the goals and objectives, and closely resemble tasks that are done in class. In many cases, the assessments *are* the tasks. Sample assessments are given in Table 7 for the undergraduates and Table 8 for the faculty members. See also Table 9 for sample materials of in-class tasks/assessments for undergraduates and Table 10 for faculty members.

Table 7

Sample assessments for the undergraduate class

Goal: Learners will use the L2 maximally in the classroom for the purpose of increasing fluency. Reading assessment: Words per minute on two reading comprehension tests written at the same difficulty level, same word length and in the same style as the graded readers used in class, administered at the end of the semester as a post-test. Words per minute calculated from two reading comprehension tests administered as pre-tests (two forms different from the post-test) will be compared to post-test words per minute. Speaking assessment: During the last three weeks of class, in-class observations will be done to evaluate whether each student actively participates and uses English to complete pair communicative tasks.
Goal: Learners will be able to formulate their language learning goals and name at least three strategies for meeting those goals. Reading assessment: Collection of forms completed by students on L1 and L2 texts they read and their purposes for reading them. Speaking assessment: Collection of interview forms which students complete in pairs or small groups in class. Students will query each other on life long learning issues in terms of speaking and share ideas on how to maintain their speaking ability once they graduate (see sample materials below, Table 9).

Table 8

Sample assessment for the faculty class

Goal: Learners will, through classroom practice, learn features of sociolinguistic knowledge and textual (conversational and rhetorical organizational) knowledge. Speaking assessment: Students will take practice *SPEAK* test items which capture the following features of rhetorical organization: narration, cause and effect, persuasion, and expressing opinions. Students will be scored using *SPEAK* test crtieria and additional notes will be written on the extent to which students use a variety of linguistic forms to realize the rhetorical patterns mentioned (see sample materials below).

Table 9

Sample materials/task/assessment for undergraduate class*

Undergraduate student life long learning interview task	
Goal:	To practice discussing issues, sharing opinions, and naming learning strategies, and to identify and share resources for life long learning and maintenance of spoken English.
Input:	Verbal instructions provided on a form, and the form itself.
Procedures:	Students work in groups of three. One person is in charge of completing the form. A second person is in charge of ensuring each person contributes to the form and to the discussion. A third person is in charge of asking for help from the teacher, if necessary.
Outcome:	A completed form with responses from all three group Members.

Life Long Learning and Speaking Group Interview Form

After you graduate, how will you continue learning and using English? This is an opportunity to discuss the

strategies we have talked about in class, and to offer some of your own ideas. Work in groups of three. One person is in charge of completing the form for everyone. A second person is in charge of making sure each person in the group contributes to the form. A third person is in charge of asking for help from the teacher.

Write the names of all three group members here:
Group member 1:
Group member 2:
Group member 3:

What work do you think you will do after you graduate?
Group member 1:
Group member 2:
Group member 3:

How much will you use English in this work?
Group member 1:
Group member 2:
Group member 3:

What is one thing you already do to use English outside of school?
Group member 1:
Group member 2:
Group member 3:

What is one way you have heard of from friends to use English?
Group member 1:
Group member 2:
Group member 3:

Together, create a list of at least five additional ways to use English once you graduate:

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* Note: Task components of goal, input, etc. are adapted from Ellis (2003).

Table 10

Sample materials for assessment for faculty class

Sample *Practice SPEAK* Test item 6*: Students see six frames of a picture story in which a man sits on a park bench with wet paint, discovers the paint on this suit, and takes the suit to the dry cleaners.

Student hear and read: *Imagine that this happens to you. After you have taken the suit to the dry clearners, you find out that you need to wear the suit the next morning. The dry cleaning service usually takes two days. Call the dry cleaners and try to persuade them to have the suit ready later today.*

Students' responses on all items, including the one above, are individually tape recorded and scored according to *SPEAK* test criteria.

Teacher's/Scorer's Form

Item 6

20 No effective communication
30 Communication generally not effective
40 Communication somewhat effective
50 Communication generally effective
60 Communication almost always effective

Linguistic forms used in student response for:

Persuasion:

Narration:

Cause and effect:

Expressing opinion:

Epilog

It is now December, 2005, and I have returned to the U.S. Going to Vietnam, and designing and evaluating "the Course" was an important mid-career task for me. Doing it allowed me to step outside of twenty years of teaching patterns in order to examine my assumptions about learning and how I put these assumptions into classroom practice. The main lesson I have learned is that EFL learners and teachers in developing countries can be very successful without the generous amount of materials and resources we are used to in more developed nations. I do not present this report as evidence that as an outsider from the U.S. that I know best how to teach in Vietnam, nor can I even claim that my approach was necessarily appropriate for Vinh University. But I do think all teachers must take on new teaching challenges and use these as opportunities for self examination and purposeful change.

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Description or Prescription for Task-Based Instruction? A Reply to Littlewood

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Bio Data:
Anthony Bruton is lecturer in foreign language teaching methodology at the University of Seville, Spain. He also teaches research methods to PhD students. He directs a research group composed of both university and secondary school teachers whose main aim is to conduct classroom-based empirical research. At present the research group is involved in a fairly large-scale medium term project into task-based teaching in secondary schools in the Seville area, partly funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education.

Abstract
This short paper analyses a recent proposal by Littlewood (2004) on the task-based approach. Littlewood offers two dimensions, task involvement and task focus, on which to place activities in the language classroom. However, it is argued that, at best, the dimensions might serve for description, but even then they have shortcomings, and are not useful in the discussions on methodological prescription. Although the definition of the types of task that are central to the task-based instruction (TBI) debate is significant, the crucial issues revolve around the centrality of the peer-work tasks with the target language as the medium of communication, and the language learning that might (or might not) accrue from them, at particular levels of proficiency.

Key Words: Tasks, Task-based instruction

Introduction

I am afraid I cannot resist a bit of debate, so I am very glad that Littlewood (2004) took me up on the issue of tasks and task-based instruction (TBI) in my two contributions to the *ELT Journal 56/*3, particularly the definition of tasks. However, since Littlewood currently teaches in Hong Kong and given the recent issue of the *Asian EFL Journal* (8/3) on tasks, I

thought this journal might be a very apt alternative forum, given its professional orientation and its readership.

The Basic Question for TBI

Although the questions of definition in TBI cannot be ignored, I think it is the broader conceptual issues that are more critical. For this reason and given limitations of space in the ELTJ article, I argued that it was the (design) purposes of different tasks that were more crucial than trying to differentiate various different types of learner activity into task or non-task, or degrees of taskiness – hence the title of my first article, "From tasking purposes to purposing tasks". In my response (Bruton, ELTJ, 56/3) to Skehan (ELTJ, 56/3) on communicative-task-based instruction, my fundamental question was: Where does the development of new language knowledge and of correct language use, particularly spoken, come from, when the core communicative tasks are performed independently in the oral medium by students? The answer seems to be either before, or after task, completion (Skehan, 1996), not during the task, which does not avoid the numerous theoretical and practical complications this pre-task/communicative oral task/post-task framework generates. I will return to some of these, but immediately I want to comment on Littlewood's alternative perspective.

Littlewood's Alternatives

Littlewood puts forward two dimensions for task-based foreign language learning: degrees of 'task-involvement' and degrees of 'focus on forms-meaning'. To begin with, I think the author must recognize that his dimensions and categories are at best descriptive, of student oral (production?) activity and involvement. Even then, I am not sure they are particularly useful or potentially effective as descriptors for cataloguing (a subset of) student activity or dispositions. However, in order to better understand the shortcomings of Littlewood's two dimensions (task involvement; focus on forms-meaning;), it is perhaps useful to distinguish between task as workplan and task as process, or between task design and task implementation, as Breen (1987) and Ellis (2003) do.

Given the distinction, let us start with Littlewood's task involvement dimension, which is apparently 'unproblematic' (p.323). This dimension can only be applicable to implementation, though *expected* involvement might be planned, and the complexity of gauging the degree of involvement is not recognized. In this respect, a point made by Widdowson (1990) on the communicativeness of syllabuses is very pertinent. He argued that there is no such thing as a communicative syllabus, because there is nothing inherently communicative about a syllabus. It is only the type of interaction in the classroom that will make the syllabus communicative, whether it is based on structures, functions, or even presumably tasks. He had a point, which is particularly applicable to Littlewood's dimension of student involvement in tasks.

Focus on Forms and Focus on Meaning

The other dimension, the continuum from 'focus on formS' to 'focus on meaning', is much more central to Littlewood's descriptive framework, but no less problematic. Not least of the problems is the perspective of this dimension, which in itself reflects a definitional question. In the case of the dubious term focus on form (not formS note), even such 'experts' as Michael Long have made the mistake of not clearly differentiating whose perspective is being adopted in the classroom: a student's, the students', or the teacher's, for example. In design terms, Long (1991; 2000) has rejected both a (pre-planned) focus on specific formS on the one hand, or purely general meaning on the other, while defending a (reactive) focus on form within communicatively negotiated interaction.

It is in fact precisely the two options discounted by Long that Littlewood has adopted (focus on forms and focus on meaning), but along a dimension, rather than as mutually exclusive categories. This may be because Littlewood acknowledges the preplanning of language focus, whereas Long assumes that the necessary focus on form would be unplanned. Littlewood's dimension, however, contradictorily applies both to the focus of the task and the focus of the students' attention (p.321), seemingly coming down in favour of the latter. Unfortunately, identifying on-going student focus on form in class, by observation, is virtually impossible descriptively, which is a limitation that has plagued empirical focus on

form studies. Less importantly, there are two arrows for this dimension in Littlewood's Figure 1 (see below), curiously pointing outwards from an undefined (meaning and forms; form; or no focus?) mid-point.

Focus on forms←----------->Focus on meaning				
Non-communicative learning	**Pre-communicative language practice**	**Communicative language practice**	**Structured communication**	**Authentic communication**
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practicing language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. 'question-and-answer' practice	Practicing pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play & simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving, and discussion
'Exercises'←---------- *(Ellis)* ----------*>'Tasks'*				
'Enabling tasks'←---------- (Estaire and Zanon) ----------*>'Communicative tasks'*				

FIGURE 1

The Continuum from Focus on form to focus on meaning (Littlewood, 2004, p. 322)

The next continuum in Littlewood's Figure 1 seems to implicitly acknowledge purpose, namely establishing language knowledge, practice, and communication, though the actual labels suggest degrees of communicativeness, but with a scale that inconsistently includes learning at one extreme and use at the other. The descriptors of the categories may help to

catalogue the types of student activity, but, for example, how substitution exercises and discovery or awareness-raising, are in the same category is a mystery ... except that they might focus on form! Furthermore, there is no reference to whether the discovery activities, for example, are completed independently of the teacher or not – a crucial variable in task-based pedagogy. Nor, as was pointed out before, can anyone ensure that one type of activity will necessarily be more communicative than another on implementation.

The last two continua in Figure 1 are taken from Ellis (2000), and Estaire and Zanon (1994). The Ellis dimension suggests degrees of taskiness, which has been complicated more recently by Ellis (2003) himself, since he acknowledges both (language) focused and unfocused tasks. In complete contrast, Estaire and Zanon adopt a curricular perspective with enabling tasks building up to the central target communicative tasks (see Swales, 1990), a procedural question which Littlewood does not cater for at all. Contemporary task procedures assume classroom activity leading *into* tasks and *on from* tasks.

Pre-On-Post Task Framework

Even though Littlewood omits procedural questions, some of them are actually very succinctly outlined and elaborated with examples by Ellis (2006) in the number 8/3 of this journal, using the pre-during/on-post-task framework typified by Skehan (1996) and Willis (1996). However, like these latter authors, Ellis seems to assume that it is the oral communication task that is necessarily the basis of task-based instruction. Within this framework, the language development is designed to occur either at the pre-task or post-task stages, but not during the peer interaction of the tasks. The main reason for this is that there is an implicit recognition that little appropriate language development is likely to result from peer interaction during these tasks (see the results in Eguchi & Eguchi (2006) also in the number 8/3 of this journal, among others), thus eliminating one of the major rationales for on-task peer exchanges, namely the interaction hypothesis for language learning (see Long & Robinson, 1998). The framework also makes certain suppositions about pre-task and post-task language-focused work. On the one hand, pre-task language work is only possible in so far as the language of the task is moderately predictable, as in what Ellis calls ‘focused’

tasks, which only represents ‘task-supported’ teaching. On the other hand, in ‘task-based’ teaching the onus is on post-task work, the argument being that the language focus results from the language needs displayed in the activity. However, apart from neither pre- nor post-task language focus having been shown to be particularly effective (see Bruton, 2005a), the latter seems to be excessively analytic, not to say potentially tedious, with reviewing learner errors, consciousness-raising from recordings, and transcript analysis being typical desserts on the menu. The other options are the so-called and much maligned traditional exercises for practising known language, presumably for accuracy, which ironically has become one of the major preoccupations of task-based teaching, and public reports, which are essentially new tasks (Bruton, 2002a), usually prepared consciously for the written medium to be read aloud. But, fundamentally, readers should not forget that the rationales both for and against ‘task-supported’ procedures, sometimes referred to as weak TBI, are very often the antithesis of the rationales for and against ‘task-based’ ones, or strong TBI.

As a parting observation on this pre-during-post framework, it is possible to broaden task-based language pedagogy to include other skills apart from oral interaction, or more specifically speaking. There is no reason why extensive reading and process writing, for example, could not both be included under a broader umbrella of tasks. However, Green (2005), for example, insists that having students just read texts without tangible tasks has produced very poor results in Hong Kong. Furthermore, typical extensive reading and process writing practices have their limitations for language development. Despite arguments to the contrary (e.g. Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 1989; 2004), extensive L2 reading with or without comprehension tasks is not very efficient or effective even for vocabulary development according to Hulstijn (2001) or Laufer (2003), who argue for more supplementary language-focused activities. As for process writing, the research and the pedagogy virtually ignores the question of language development (Bruton, 2005b), except for the seemingly endless debate about the effect of correction, but only on accuracy (see Truscott, 2004). So, it would seem that the other skill-based tasks need pre- and post-task work for language development as well, though dictionaries and glosses can be used on-task in reading (e.g. Knight, 1994), and writing (Bruton, 2005b). Finally, another possible

candidate for inclusion under tasks are teacher-fronted tasks, possibly interspersed with peer tasks or vice versa, which may be language-focused (Samuda, 2001) or not (Nunn, 2006), but that is another story.

The Crux of the Matter

Returning to the fray, logically it is the centrality of the core task that is the crux of the task debate. More specifically, is the oral communication task, with no pre-planned language focus, to be taken as central, with all the inherent consequences, or not? Littlewood's descriptive framework, ultimately reflecting hypothetical student perspectives, rather misses the point. The current communicative-task-based perspective in L2 methodology is very much a reflection of the rejection of planned learning of targeted (not always itemized, mind) language in the classroom, but not necessarily because it is prescriptive. Current (progressive?) L2 methodological orthodoxy is no less prescriptive, and it has to be, because ultimately classroom work in educational institutions will be planned to a degree – but see Scott Thornbury's (2004) letter of lament. The difference is that this current prescriptivism tends to emphasize the non-language-learning side of formal language instruction: be more humanistic, decentralize the classroom, foster collaboration, develop strategies, adopt a task-based syllabus, prioritize communicative tasks, use projects, rely heavily on extensive reading or process writing, etc. A wide and very often daunting array of laudable practices. The problem is that, at the end of the day, the ultimate yardstick in the FL class is not just about doing or being happy, but rather the extent of the tangible language development that has been achieved in a given amount of time, and most responsible FL teachers know that.

Back to the Basic Question

At the risk of being a pain and a bore, I persist with the question: In communicative-task-based language instruction in a FL, where does the demonstrable (new) language learning happen, how at what proficiency levels, and how well? Over and out.

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Book Review

Landing a College Job: A Practical Guide for English, ESL, and Foreign Language Job Seekers.
Meena Singhal. Lowell, MA: The Reading Matrix, 2005. Pp. 114.

Reviewed by Toshiyuki Takagaki
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One of the many wonderful aspects about being a language teacher is that the profession offers opportunities to teach different levels at various institutions and locations. However, as is often the case with other occupations, if one intends to work where one wants to, it is always wise to be well prepared for the job and this includes preparation for both the application and interview processes because the position may be a highly competitive one. Should one be interested in teaching at a college in America or Canada, for example, Singhal*'s Landing a College Job: A Practical Guide for English, ESL, and Foreign Language Job Seekers* is a must-have book, for this self-help guide describes "the A-Z of the job search process beginning with finding job postings to landing a full-time position" (p. 5).

Inside the text, readers will find the answers to several key questions job seekers often have. For example, do you know the difference between a resume and a CV? Do you know there are several key differences between university and college interviews? What kind of attire is most suitable for an interview? Have you ever thought about sending a thank-you note after the interview? What can you expect from the interview panel? And how can you best prepare for a college-level interview?

What makes this book's advice valid and appealing is that its contents come directly from the author's rich experiences of college job hunting and hiring new faculty members for her community college in Southern California. Because of her experience as both a college instructor and administrator, she is able to offer job seekers the inside scoop on the job search

process in this type of setting throughout each of the book's ten chapters. Such information and advice include useful websites to locate position openings (chapter 1); the differences between minimum requirements and desirable requirements (chapter 2); how to organize application documents and write a cover letter (chapters 3 and 4); the differences between a resume and a CV (chapter 5); understanding the interview format and preparing for the interview (chapters 6 and 7); writing a follow-up letter (chapter 8); and the importance of professional development and networking (chapters 9 and 10). Furthermore, a list of useful websites for job seekers is provided at the end of the book as well as access to the text's companion website at www.readingmatrix.com/jobs/.

In addition to being filled with useful information, another of the book's key features is that it is written in a clear and concise manner which results in an extremely reader-friendly book. Moreover, with its effective use of written samples and adapted materials from other sources (e.g. websites from academic associations), the book is a quick, insightful read which can be read in one sitting.

There is no doubt that readers will treasure this guidebook throughout the job search process, for while many graduate programs prepare students to teach and conduct research, few prepare potential instructors to find and land the job they want. Thus, in a market where there may be more than one hundred applications for one position, this book is highly recommended.

Book Review

***Learning and Teaching English in India*.**
Ravi Sheorey. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006. Pp. 227.

Reviewed by Periyasamy Dhanavel
Anna University
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Ravi Sheorey's *Learning and Teaching English in India* is the seventh volume in the *Research in Applied Linguistics* Series from Sage Publications, India. The series aims "to present research done in and about multilingual societies" and "to provide a new orientation to the field of Applied Linguistics through a careful investigation of multilingual societies" (p. 2). Sheorey's book achieves this dual aim by applying well-established theories of second language acquisition to the multilingual Indian context with a meticulous and professional approach to the vast collection and insightful interpretation of data to provide a clear picture of English language learning in India.

The ten chapters in the book fall into three broad categories: i) the Indian context, ii) the Indian teachers, and iii) the Indian learners. The first chapter on the Indian context provides the background for the entire study of English language learning and teaching in India. It is an analytical history of English in India with a local and a global perspective. Sheorey gives an insider-outsider analysis of the often complicated enterprise of English learning and teaching in India, as he is an Indian working at an American university. This chapter uncovers the ground by reviewing well-known studies in the field, records the transition from the era of 'banish English' to the current scenario of 'welcome English', highlights the empowering force of English for the vast masses, observes the attitudes of students and teachers to English, examines the type of materials and methods used and the kinds of examinations conducted to test proficiency in English, and points to the bright future of learning and teaching English in India.

Chapters 3 and 10 deal with Indian teachers' beliefs about English language learning and their perceptions of the seriousness of grammatical errors committed by students, respectively. These two chapters indicate that Indian teachers' beliefs and attitudes significantly influence students' learning of English. Sheorey also offers the implications of these beliefs for teacher education in India. He hopes that the training of teachers with an awareness of their beliefs in the light of current theories in ELT will be helpful in developing more productive teachers of English.

The remaining seven chapters are devoted to Indian students of English who deal with such diverse aspects of their learning as their own theories of learning English, the strategies they use, their learning styles, the role played by their motivation and attitude, and the degree of language learning anxiety they experience while learning English. Notably, Sheorey is also able to give a comparative analysis of almost all of these aspects with reference to studies involving American, Korean, Chinese, Egyptian, and students from other nationalities as well as the differences and similarities in terms of male and female, rural and urban, high school and college Indian students to emphasize that Indian students are a hardworking and motivated lot with a firm determination to master the English language for their social mobility and professional enrichment.

The author's uncommon and abundant interest in students and their abilities reflects a paradigm shift in ELT from teacher-centered teaching to learner-centered learning. In fact, his research may be called learner-centered SL learning research. Though he has brought in many relevant postulates from ELT theoreticians, he prevents himself from falling into the trap of pure imaginative theory. Instead, he displays the age-old proven practice of listening actively to the students to arrive at a learning theory of English in India. He has been able to achieve this stupendous task by teaming with like-minded English teachers across India in developing the appropriate surveys for the studies reported, pilot testing them, and administering their final versions over a period of six years. Readers will notice that the data in each chapter are subjected to careful statistical analysis and interpretation, each chapter has a sound theoretical background with a review of relevant literature in the field, and above

all, he remains a humble and honest researcher and never assumes authority for prescribing a course of action for quick results.

Despite the positive attributes, there appears to be two shortcomings in the volume. First, the word “teaching” does not really belong to the title as the book is almost entirely devoted to empirical studies on the learning of English. Secondly, a chapter (or an appendix) on conducting survey research would have been immensely beneficial to Indian research scholars. Overall, however, Ravi Sheorey’s *Learning and Teaching English in India* is a welcome and commendable addition to the ELT literature in India. Teachers and researchers of English the world over will find this to book an invaluable resource of research findings about students and teachers engaged in the pursuit of English education in India.

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Style:
1. All reviews should conform to the Journal's APA guideline requirements and references should be used sparingly.
2. Authors should use plural nouns rather than gendered pronouns such as he/she, his/her him/her and adhere to the APA's Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language, which can be found at:
http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/texts/nonsexist.html.