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Punctuation and Spelling in Learners' Writing

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Abstract

Despite their apparent straightforwardness, certain features of language seem almost less teachable. The learners' writing is often full of minor errors on surface features that make it hard for the reader to make sense of it, let alone appreciate its content. These language features are taught to students of English during their first two years of education at university. However, whether these courses accomplish that goal to an acceptable point is questionable.

The present study focuses on two such aspects of writing, punctuation and spelling, in the writing of advanced level students at an Iranian University. For this purpose, three different subject groups are chosen from among those who have passed Grammar and Writing I, Grammar and Writing II, and Advanced Writing. Using a recognition-production (henceforth R-P) and a composition task, the performance of these groups is compared in various aspects of punctuation. For the measurement of spelling, a descriptive approach is taken based on the misspellings observed in the students' compositions. These errors are classified according to their assumed causes, and frequency counts are performed for the words of each category. The results of the punctuation and spelling tasks are compared across test items, subject groups and task types, using various statistical means. Overall, it was found that the courses mentioned above did not make much contribution to the development of the students' writing in terms of spelling and punctuation.

Keywords: punctuation, spelling, writing, teaching.

1. Introduction

In spite of the recent focus on process-oriented approaches to writing and the call for more emphasis on content rather than form both in L1 and L2, in their practice of writing classes, many teachers maintain a strong interest in correctness on the surface levels of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, etc. (Fathman & Whalley, 1990, p. 178). Cumming,

Kantor & Powers (2002) realized that expert TOEFL writing assessors consider aspects of surface form such as length, spelling, punctuation, etc. before attending to the content.

It is usually assumed that as L2 knowledge increases, various language skills develop automatically. However, as Koda (1999, p. 51) maintains, empirical evidence suggests otherwise; certain language skills, particularly those involved in writing, seem to require explicit instruction. Casanave & Hubbard (1992, p. 34) observe that surface language errors (including those of punctuation and spelling) distinguish native speakers from non-native speakers in the views of their instructors, and this persists for EFL writers at very advanced proficiency levels.

Schmitt & Christianson (1998, p. 575) concede that an EFL instructor spends a great deal of time correcting mistakes in the mechanics of composition, especially in punctuation and spacing as well as in spelling. They relate this basically to the lack of a habit in the students to proof-read their own texts before submitting them. Sometimes, however, this lack of attention is also evident among teachers or researchers. The importance of the mechanics of writing including those of punctuation and spelling seems so vast, especially in today's discourse studies in writing, that a real call for research in the area is necessary. To this end, the present study looks at many of these mechanisms from two task types: recognition-production (R-P) and production in terms of composition. Because it seems it is in the production task that learners tend to use numerous unrelated punctuation forms.

2. Review of literature

In what follows, we discuss two mainstreams of writing mechanism which students encounter difficulties, punctuation and spelling. These two are mistakenly considered somewhat trivial to many students, and this causes teachers to often ignore them as being insignificant too. Students should realize that some of these errors are so crucial that they sometimes can hamper communication.

2.1 Punctuation

The development of punctuation is of psychological and educational importance because it is a part of writing that needs to be dealt with in text construction (Ferreiro & Pontecorvo, 1999, pp. 544-545). Shaughnessy (1977, p. 124) sees punctuation as a response to sentence structure. In her view, the basic role of modern punctuation is to “sharpen the sense of structure in a sentence.” Chafe (1987), however, argues that punctuation should be considered in strict connection with the particular organization, structure, and prosody of the

written text at the discourse level, not merely the sentence. Gamaroff (2000) recognizes that some punctuation marks (henceforth PM's) affect the coherence of the text to a certain extent.

In spoken discourse, pauses perform various functions such as regulating the rhythm of thought and articulation, and suggesting grammatical structure. The lack of these means of expression in the written mode is partially compensated by punctuation marks. Messenger & Taylor (1989, p. 162) acknowledge that in writing, punctuation takes the place of the sound features (pitch, volume, speed) and physical gestures constantly used in speech.

Steinhauer's (2003) study strongly supports the notion of a direct correspondence between punctuation and implicit prosody, which is defined as the rhythm of the writer's inner voice. He discovered that commas are in fact likely to trigger subvocal prosodic phrasing. He also found that both punctuation and implicit prosody during reading may have a strong influence on how we comprehend sentences (Steinhauer, 2003, p. 143).

Punctuation marks have been studied within a variety of theoretical and descriptive frameworks. Broadly, they have been relegated to organizational and rhetorical roles (Bar-Aba, 2003, p. 1032). The organizational punctuation marks are said to signify breathing, syntax and rhythm. Included here are quotation marks and commas. The rhetorical punctuation marks, on the other hand, play a discursive-expressive role. They convey the writer's attitude with respect to the status of the information. Among these are, for example, exclamation points and ellipsis dots.

A main characteristic of basic writers' punctuation is the inconsistency in their use of commas and periods – which are, in fact, the two most frequently used marks of punctuation (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 17). Commas are inserted at odd places which suggest no structural requirement, and both commas and periods mark off sentence terminations, or presumed terminations. A main source of error shows up as the failure to tell sentence boundaries which often leads to the incorrect joining of two or more sentences with a comma (comma splice) or with no punctuation at all (run-on).

2.2 Spelling

One of the hardest tasks the beginning writer of English must overcome is the acquisition of spelling. Over a third of the errors that students in writing courses make at the first level of instruction are spelling errors, and as the students move into more advanced vocabulary and begin to take greater risks with words, the proportion of errors may grow to almost half (Shaughnessy, 1977, p. 12). This difficulty is largely due to the ambiguous relationship

between the spoken sounds of the language and the graphemes that represent them in writing. In Shaw's (1965, p. 3) words, "the correct spelling of many words does not even approximate the sounds being represented." In an analysis of a corpus of misspellings, Katz & Frost (2001, p. 303) discovered that errors are not aphonological, but rather, are nearly always errors that produce a homophone for the correct spelling.

The most vulnerable letters in a word's orthographic representation are those whose relation to the word's phonology is most ambiguous (Katz & Frost, 2001, p. 305). Katz & Frost consider 'geminate' (due to their apparent irrelevance to pronunciation) and 'unstressed vowels' (because of their particularly ambiguous relation to the printed vowel) the most ambiguous. Shaw (1965, p. 51) recounts that no words in English are more often misspelled than those which contain unstressed (or lightly stressed) vowels. Katz & Frost (2001, p. 305) refer to the reduction of unstressed vowels to schwa /ə/, which makes them less favored for graphemic encoding.

Another major feature of the system that causes spelling "demons" is the existence of mute graphemes (silent letters). These belong to different levels of predictability based on the clarity and consistence of the functions they perform in the orthography (Vachek, 1973, pp. 53-54). As an example, the silent *e* which frequently occurs at the ends of words has the definite function of lengthening the vowel in the preceding syllable, as in *sit* versus *site*. In contrast, Vachek mentions instances of mute graphemes like the *b* in *doubt* and *debt*, which he ranks as "clear foreignisms". Ryan (1973, p. 4) believes that for many people the key to good spelling is distinguishing between long vowels and short vowels.

The cognitive representation of a word's spelling has been characterized by Katz & Frost (2001, p. 298) as consisting of two kinds of information: (1) association between phonemes or phoneme clusters and letters, and (2) associations between spoken morphemes (including words) and whole printed morphemes. Koda (1999, p. 53) relates the lack of accord between pronunciation and orthography directly to the nature of English orthographic representations.

In their study of the developmental stages in the acquisition of spelling strategies, Varnhagen, McCallum & Burstow (1997, p. 454) found that morphologically based spelling strategies occur slightly later in development than phonological and orthographic strategies. They found morphology to be the most difficult type of linguistic information for children to acquire.

Misspellings do not always have roots in the orthographic system. Shaw (1965, p. 103) observed that over half the errors commonly made are caused by misspelling the easy, simple words that nearly everyone can spell, due to "oversights" or mistakes of the eye.

Letter reversals (scrambles) and graphic confusions (e.g. mistaking *b* for *d* or *p* for *q*) also belong to this category.

3. Methodology and research design

Within the Iranian academic context, the first two years of college for the students of all branches of the English language studies the focus is on general English. Students take numerous courses on various language skills. However, despite the great amount of time and effort put during this period, it is often observed that students still suffer from many problems in their pronunciation, grammar and writing. These problems sometimes remain with the student long after s/he has taken up more specialized courses in the fields of literature or translation. The result is that sometimes graduate students attempt specialized areas of language while still suffering from very basic language problems. The present study aims at two such aspects, punctuation and spelling, in the writing of Iranian EFL learners at tertiary level.

The need to examine actual students' texts has been emphasized by Lillis (2001, p.27) as a worthy research focus for the investigation of their writing. On this basis, we hypothesize that spelling and punctuation problems in this group of learners are more than we imagine. Problems of this type can impede readers because as they are often interrupted, they lose their concentration on the content of what they read.

3.1 Participants

In order to measure the effectiveness of the writing courses offered to these students with respect to punctuation and spelling, an equal number of 25 students for each of the following courses were chosen randomly from among those who have passed Grammar and Writing I, Grammar and Writing II, and Advanced Writing. The first two courses are offered as students' first-year curricular program each with 68 hours of instruction and the third one as a second-year course with 34 hours of instruction. So, they totally receive 170 hours of teaching in their writing courses.

3.2 Instrument and procedure

Two different tasks are used for the elicitation of punctuation marks: a written production task in which they are asked to write a summary of a short film right after they watch it, with no special focus on either punctuation or spelling, and a recognition-production task in which they are asked to punctuate a number of sentences and paragraphs. The first task aims to

investigate their natural performance, while the second is designed to make sure that they will have opportunity to use all punctuation marks. The performance of these groups on punctuation is compared between and across items as well as between subject groups, and between the two tasks. A combination of production task, which engages learners into actual writing, and recognition task, (combined as P-R task), which would save much of the mental effort a writer needs to exert for thinking up and inventing new content (Ferreiro & Pontecorvo, 1999, p.547) can show a clear picture of students' ability in spelling and punctuation. This would thus depress faltering over what to write about an assigned topic (ibid).

The materials used to elicit data on the subjects' punctuation and spelling production comprised a video clip and a printed sheet. The clip was one of the episodes of Richard et al. (1998) EFL course, *New Interchange* (VCD intro, *The Doctor and the Patient*) which was meant to provide them with content they would then describe in written form. The printed sheet used as the other task was based on Finocchiaro & Bonomo's (1973, p.216) list of methods to assess students' writing ability. The sheet contained 30 sentences and short paragraphs entirely typed in lower case, and all punctuation marked deleted (see Appendix 1). These were adopted from various books or manuals on punctuation and were meant to show the use of capitalization and punctuation in different categories which can be observed in Appendix 2, the rater's reference. The main purpose of this task was to make sure of the existence of an appropriate context which would necessitate the use of all punctuation marks.

Data analysis

Subjects' punctuation sheets (Appendix 1) were checked against the raters' reference (Appendix 2) and instances of plausible use of each punctuation mark were recorded for each subject. A MANOVA was run to display the probable significance between-group as opposed to within-group differences. A one-way ANOVA then determined the punctuation marks which differentiated greatest degree between three groups. As the punctuation marks expected in the task greatly varied in number, three different statistical tests were employed to study those that fell within similar frequency range: a Tukey test, a Kruskal-Wallis test and a Chi-Square.

When subjects' written reports on film were checked for spelling, all instances of misspelling were noted down. These were then classified according to their type and possible causes. Finally, using various statistical means, the results were compared both between test items and between subject groups with the aim of identifying the major causes of error and

measuring the effectiveness of education on the subjects' performance in writing.

4. Results and Discussion

In what follows, firstly various statistical calculations are presented followed by the discussion as a separate section. Overall, all the punctuation marks cited above were compared against one another to yield a more concrete result and a better understanding of the relations between them.

4.1 Results of punctuation in recognition-production task

The number of correct insertions of various punctuation marks by each subject was summed up for the three groups of Grammar and Writing 1 (GW1), Grammar and Writing 2 (GW2) and Advanced Writing (AW). The means and standard deviations of these appear in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Correct insertions of different items in the R-P task across the three subject groups

Punctuation Mark	GW1		GW2		AW	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Capitalization	43.2800	16.8115	50.7600	14.8865	51.9600	14.7040
Period	25.8400	4.2786	28.2800	3.6116	29.2000	3.0414
Question Mark	.2800	.4583	.2800	.4583	.3600	.4899
Exclamation Mark	1.5600	.6506	1.4000	.5000	1.4400	.5066
Comma	7.3200	3.0100	9.4800	3.9594	10.9600	4.2961
Apostrophe	1.9200	1.8912	3.3600	2.4813	3.7600	3.0039
Hyphen	2.0000	.9129	2.2800	.9798	2.4800	1.5578
Colon	.1600	.3742	.1600	.3742	.2400	.4359
Semicolon	.7600	.4359	.5600	.5066	.6000	.5000
Quotation	.2400	.4359	.3600	.4899	.4800	.5099
Speech Mark	1.5600	.8206	1.4400	.7681	1.9600	.8406
Parentheses	1.1600	.3742	1.4000	.5774	1.3600	.4899
Dash	0.0400	.2000	.0400	.2000	.0400	.2000

Slash	0.4000	.2000	.0000	.0000	.4000	.2000
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Because these fell within highly different ranges of frequency as expected in the test paper (from 2 for semicolons to 76 for capitalizations), the test items were divided into three classes based on their range of variance. In the first class, the most frequent punctuation marks— capital, period, comma and apostrophe— were considered. The second class comprised of exclamation marks, hyphens, speech marks and parentheses. The third, which contained the least frequent marks, included slashes, dashes, question marks, quotation marks, colons and semicolons.

The means and standard deviations for punctuation marks of the first frequency class, that is capitalization, period, comma and apostrophe, can be seen in Table 2 below for the three subject groups— Grammar and Writing I, Grammar and Writing II and Advanced Writing. A MANOVA test of the data in Table 3 reveals that a significant difference exists between at least two of the dependent variables ($P < 0.05$). A one-way ANOVA is then carried out to find the significantly differentiating area(s).

Table 2. Performance of the three groups on class 1 items in the R-P Task

Punctuation Mark	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Capital	GW1	43.2800	16.8115
	GW2	50.7600	14.8865
	AW	51.9600	14.7040
	Total	48.6667	15.7672
Period	GW1	25.8400	4.2786
	GW2	28.2800	3.6116
	AW	29.2000	3.0414
	Total	27.7733	3.8993
Comma	GW1	7.3200	3.0100
	GW2	9.8400	3.9594
	AW	10.9600	4.2961
	Total	9.2533	4.0340
Apostrophe	GW1	1.9200	1.8912
	GW2	3.3600	2.4813
	AW	3.7600	3.0039
	Total	3.0133	2.5915

Table 3. Inter-group differences for class 1 items in the R-P Task

Punctuation Mark	Type III Sum of Squares	F	Significance
Capital	1106.107	2.303	.107
Period	150.747	5.569	.006
Comma	167.547	5.818	.005
Apostrophe	46.827	3.745	.028

The data in Table 4 below show that for the first item, period, significant differences exist only between groups GW1 and AW (P=0.05). With the other two punctuation marks, comma and apostrophe; likewise, no significant difference is observed between any successive groups; however, the differences between GW1 and AW are significant. This suggests a moderate progress in the performance of students on the insertion of periods, commas and apostrophes as they move to Advanced Writing.

Table 4. Inter-group differences between differentiation class 1 items in the R-P Task using Tukey test

Punctuation Mark	Group1– Group 2	Mean Difference (1-2)	Standard Error	Significance
Period	GW1 – GW2	-2.4400	1.0405	.056
	GW1 – AW	-3.3600	1.0405	.050
	GW2 – GW1	2.4400	1.0405	.056
	GW2 – AW	-.9200	1.0405	.652
	AW – GW1	3.3600	1.0405	.050
	AW – GW2	.9200	1.0405	.652
Comma	GW1 – GW2	-2.1600	1.0732	.116
	GW1 – AW	-3.6400	1.0732	.003
	GW2 – GW1	2.1600	1.0732	.116
	GW2 – AW	-1.4800	1.0732	.357
	AW – GW1	3.6400	1.0732	.003
	AW – GW2	1.4800	1.0732	.357
Apostrophe	GW1 – GW2	-1.4400	.7072	.111
	GW1 – AW	-1.8400	.7072	.030
	GW2 – GW1	1.4400	.7072	.111
	GW2 – AW	-.4000	.7072	.839
	AW – GW1	1.8400	.7072	.030
	AW – GW2	.4000	.7072	.839

Table 5 below illustrates the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for the second class of PM's.

The only significant difference observable in this group is that of speech marks between GW1 and AW or GW2 and AW. For the third class of punctuation marks, that is slashes, dashes, question marks, quotation marks, colons and semicolons, the result is manifested in Table 6.

Table 5. Comparison of the groups' performance on class 2 items in the R-P Task

Punctuation Mark	Group	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	Significance
Exclamation Mark	GW1	40.34	.648	.723
	GW2	36.10		
	AW	37.56		
Hyphen	GW1	34.48	1.057	.590
	GW2	39.84		
	AW	39.68		
Speech Mark	GW1	35.64	6.170	.046
	GW2	32.68		
	AW	45.68		
Parentheses	GW1	32.94	3.267	.195
	GW2	40.76		
	AW	40.32		

Table 6. Comparison of the groups' performance on class 3 items in the R-P Task

Punctuation Mark	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Percent correct
Slash	1.027	2	.598	51.35
Dash	.000	2	1.000	0.00
Question Mark	.502	2	.778	50.20
Quotation Mark	1.125	2	.210	56.25
Colon	.703	2	.704	70.30
Semicolon	0.431	2	.297	43.10

No significant differences are observed for punctuation marks of this class. However, this may be due to a shortcoming of the test. The expected number of punctuation marks of this class may have been too small to show any distinguishing patterns between the three subject groups.

4.2 Results of punctuation in production task

In this task only the three most frequent punctuation marks, capitals, periods and commas, were considered. The acceptable insertions and the overall expected number of each

punctuation mark were counted in the essays of each of the 75 subjects. Then, the first number was divided by the latter and multiplied by 100 to give in a percentage for the performance of each individual. Based on these percentages, the observed means and standard deviations for the three subject groups are calculated (see Table 2 above). Although the averages show a slight increase in the number of acceptable uses of the marks from GW1 to GW2 and AW (for commas, only from GW1 to GW2), the MANOVA does not show any significant differences between them.

4.3 Results of spelling production task

For the purpose of the analysis of the spelling production of the subjects, their handwritten essays were checked for misspellings of various types. To get an overall view of the misspelled words, these words were checked against Kilgarriff's (2005) frequency ranking list of English words. Each misspelled word was assigned to one of five frequency rank ranges within 500 intervals. The total number of the words in each rank range for each subject group appears in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Frequency rank range of misspelled words on Kilgarriff's scale

Group	A: 1-500	B: 501-1000	C: 1001-1500	D: 1501-2000	E>2000
GW1	53 (44.16%)	19	13	15	20
GW2	50 (40.00%)	29	11	15	20
AW	37 (44.50%)	30	10	6	18

The table, interestingly, shows that the greatest number of misspellings for all groups fall within the range of the 500 most frequent words of the English language. These misspellings can be due to a range of different causes, including slips of the pen. Since the students' essays were not of the same length, the number of errors of each subject was divided by the total number of words in each individual's essay and then multiplied by 100. The resulting percentages are shown in Table 8 below for the entire population.

Table 8. Overall performance on the Spelling Task

Measure	Total Words	Misspellings	Percent of Misspellings
Mean	166.7333	5.0133	3.11
Standard Deviation	51.83220	3.66316	2.032
Minimum	70.00	.00	.00
Maximum	268.00	17.00	10

It is seen from this table that each student, on average, made over 5 misspellings on a single handwritten page, which means on a page of approximately 100 words, each student's failure is about 10%.

To investigate the nature of each misspelling, a descriptive approach was taken. Similar misspellings were classified under common headings. Subsequently, the total number of items under each heading was calculated for each subject. The results of these analyses appear in Table 9 below for the whole population and in Table 10 as distributed between subject groups.

It can be seen from Table 9 that, on average, the greatest causes of misspellings have been the choice of the vowel— often that corresponding to the unstressed vowel or schwa— and wrong analogies between words that sound similar but have different origins and thus different orthographic representations.

Table 9. Misspellings caused by various reasons

Type	Mean	Std Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	Percent of All Errors
Suffix	.3867	.78660	.00	5.00	6.51
Final 'e'	.6133	.98493	.00	4.00	10.33
Consonant	.7733	1.04718	.00	5.00	13.06
Double Consonant	.2533	.54756	.00	2.00	4.26
Vowel	1.3733	1.45911	.00	7.00	23.14
Wrong Analogy	1.0133	1.14483	.00	5.00	17.07
Mispronunciation	.5067	.92083	.00	5.00	8.54
Handwriting	.5333	.75933	.00	3.00	8.98
Slip of the Pen	.4800	.66495	.00	2.00	8.09

Table 10. Percent of the misspellings of each group for each cause

Type	Group	Mean	Std Dev.	Max.	Percent of All Errors
Suffix	GW1	.5200	1.12250	5.00	8.73
	GW2	.2400	.52281	2.00	4.04
	AW	.4000	.57735	2.00	6.24
Final 'e'	GW1	.7600	1.23423	4.00	12.80
	GW2	.4400	.65064	2.00	7.41
	AW	.6400	.99499	4.00	10.78
Consonant	GW1	.8800	1.01325	3.00	14.83
	GW2	1.2000	1.29099	5.00	20.22

	AW	.2400	.43589	1.00	4.04
Double Consonant	GW1	.2000	.50000	2.00	3.37
	GW2	.3600	.63770	2.00	6.06
	AW	.2000	.50000	2.00	3.37
Vowel	GW1	1.4800	1.85113	7.00	24.94
	GW2	1.5200	1.26227	4.00	25.61
	AW	1.1200	1.20139	5.00	18.82
Wrong Analogy	GW1	.9200	1.18743	4.00	15.50
	GW2	1.2800	1.27541	5.00	21.57
	AW	.8400	.94340	3.00	14.15
Mispronunciation	GW1	.7200	.93630	3.00	12.13
	GW2	.3200	1.02956	5.00	5.39
	AW	.4800	.77028	3.00	8.09
Handwriting	GW1	.3200	.62716	2.00	5.39
	GW2	.6800	.80208	3.00	11.46
	AW	.6000	.81650	3.00	10.11
Slip of the Pen	GW1	.7200	.73711	2.00	12.13
	GW2	.3600	.56862	2.00	6.06
	AW	.3600	.63770	2.00	6.06

Table 10 shows the data as distributed between the three subject groups. For group GW1, problems with suffixes have been more frequent than problems due to wrong analogies. This could have been expected considering their limited knowledge of word-formation compared to GW2 and AW. Subjects in group GW2 manifested an equal number of misspellings due to consonants, mispronunciations and wrong analogies. AW subjects' essays, however, suffered from larger numbers of misspellings due to the use of the wrong vowel letter. A discussion of this part of the data follows in section 4.5 below.

4.4 Expansion of the punctuation tasks

Below, some major causes of errors with respect to the different punctuation marks in this study are discussed. Arguments are also provided as to why such errors are susceptible and ways are proposed to preclude some of these errors.

4.4.1 Major causes of errors

The comparison between the punctuation marks in this section is carried out within classes of marks with similar frequencies. In the first frequency class, apostrophes appeared as the most troublesome punctuation marks for GW1 and GW2 subjects in the R-P task. Apostrophes

were often ignored both for contracted auxiliaries (be and have) and for the possessive cases. Commas appeared as making the largest number of errors compared to periods and capitalization in both the R-P and the production task for all the three subject groups. The reason may be the relatively more patterned nature of capitalizations and periods. Every sentence begins with a capital letter (although there are other instances of the use of this marker, too) and nearly all sentences end in periods. Commas, however, are inserted within the sentence, so their locations are less easily identifiable than the other two marks.

It seems here that it would have been wiser if the test items had been planned to break this patterning of periods and capitals to some extent, for example, by random omission of a certain portion instead of completely erasing all occurrences of these marks from the text.

In the second frequency group, for GW1 subjects, parentheses, for GW2 subjects, speech marks, and for AW subjects, exclamation marks appeared to be the most troublesome. No common pattern of errors developed in this class. Besides, PM's of this class (and the third) were not considered in the production task because their frequency was too small to lend itself to statistical analyses.

In the third class, the students' performance on dashes equaled the average of zero. In the R-P task, dashes were required to set off an abrupt break in the structure of the sentence. However, as the data show, participants in all the three groups failed to notice this. This signifies unfamiliarity with the power of punctuation marks to create variation in texts by breaking the linearity. The second greatest causes of difficulty in this class of marks were semicolons. However, it may not be right to consider all absences of semicolons as punctuation errors because semicolons can often be replaced by periods.

On the whole, the data of the second and the third frequency classes were not much fruitful. For better analyzable results, larger numbers of these marks would have been needed. However, in that case, the proportion of these marks to the complete class of punctuation marks would have become unnatural, unless an overall increase was exerted on the number of punctuation marks and hence, the size of the test, which would bore the examinees and affect their contributions negatively.

4.4.2 Inter-group differences

Differences between the three subject groups of GW1, GW2 and AW were calculated for the four most frequent punctuation marks– the capital, the period, the comma and the apostrophe– in the production task, and for the same marks except apostrophes in the R-P task. No significant difference was observed between any two groups as regards

capitalization. There were slight improvements, however, from GW1 to GW2 and from GW2 to AW.

The difference between GW1 and GW2 subjects' performance on periods was slightly lower than the level of significance ($P=.056$, see Table 4 above), and still lower between GW2 and AW. The overall difference between GW1 and AW, however, was significant ($p=.05$, see the same table). This shows a slow but steady improvement in the students' performance on periods as they progress through the three writing courses.

A shortcoming of the study which is revealed here is the disregard of extra marks. Some of the students often inserted wrong or redundant periods where they needed commas, question marks, exclamation marks, etc. These errors have been counted under the missing marks, but not under errors concerning the period.

With commas, slight improvements from GW1 to GW2 and from GW2 to AW led to a significant difference between GW1 and AW ($P<.05$). Most missed commas appeared with subordinate elements, linked main clauses and appositives, which seem to have grammatical bases and are improved as students become more competent in English syntax.

Apostrophes were considered only in the R-P task where they were elicited with singular and plural possessives and in contractions. Similar to periods and commas, the differences between the performances of subsequent groups were insignificant, but these led to a significant difference between GW1 and AW, which is, again, indicative of a slow but steady trend of progress through the three courses. Although the sentences eliciting this mark were short and so less distracting, many students failed to provide the apostrophe for contracted verbs. Apostrophes with possessive plurals, likewise, were often ignored, or the nouns were mistakenly treated as singular which could indicate a somewhat lack of enough attention to the meaning, among other things, while inserting punctuation marks.

4.4.3 Inter-task differences

Three marks of punctuation were considered in both the production and the R-P task the comparison of whose results is presented in this section. The performance of all three subject groups on capitalization was significantly better in the production task than it was in the R-P task. This may be related to the fairly habitual nature of capitalization in writing at the beginning of sentences or with proper nouns, for example, where it is learned as part of the spelling of the word. In a recognition task, more effort is needed to identify where – especially within the sentence – words need to be capitalized. Some of the proper nouns used in the R-P task were probably new to the students (e.g. Napoleon); however, using the

context, they could identify them as proper nouns. So the great difference may be either due to the basically habitual (as opposed to knowledge-based) capitalization by students, or to failure of the eye to spot the many instances of required capitals within the sentence.

With period, unlike capitals, all groups performed poorer in the production task although the difference was significant only for the AW group. The interesting observation here is that in the R-P task, not only more periods were inserted where they were needed, but also there were more instances of the wrong use of this mark compared to the production task. Thus, there has been a general tendency in the subjects to overuse periods in the R-P task, where they were more conscious about punctuation. In fact, a few seemed to associate punctuating with the insertion of periods. In their normal writing behavior, however, many subjects left their sentences open-ended.

The other case of the elicitation of periods in the R-P task was with abbreviated forms. The students' performance on these items was generally not acceptable. Many of them missed the period after Ms., esp., etc. which are all highly common abbreviations.

The subjects' performance on the use of commas was better in the production task compared to the R-P in all groups, although a significant difference existed only between the GW2 group's performances. The examination of the students' written essays sheds light on an interesting point here. The structures used by most students did not require many commas. Few students used subordinate elements or appositives. In fact, their use of commas was mainly limited to between the items in a series because the structures they produced did not demand more than that. In the R-P task, however, more advanced structures were used to elicit this mark, which many students probably failed to comply with, at least as regards punctuation.

4.5 Expansion of the spelling task

In this section, the focus is laid on the causes of misspelling. This is the area students encounter many difficulties. As can be seen below, there is a considerable size of errors among the most 500 frequent words.

4.5.1 Major causes of misspelling

Most of the misspelled words of all three groups fell within the range of the 500 most frequent words of the English language. Included in this range were words such as *one*, *right*, *always* and *patient*. Smaller proportions of misspellings belonged to frequency ranges beyond the first 1000 most common words. This may be because students used fewer words

in these frequency ranges, which is quite expectable.

Among the nine different causes of misspellings studied in this research, vowel letters were the greatest source of problem constituting over 23 percent of the errors (see Tables 9 and 10 above); following this were the wrong analogies, with over 17 percent, drawn with words that sounded the same (homophones) or similar (sound-alikes), but were, in fact, of different origins, and thus orthographically dissimilar. Most of the misspellings caused by the choice of the wrong vowel were with the vowels in unstressed syllables (schwa) which is known as a major problematic area of the English spelling system, even with native speakers.

Misspellings caused by the choice of the consonant constituted about 13 percent of the errors. Most of these errors were with compound graphemes— letter clusters representing a single consonant sound, such as *sc* standing for /s/.

Problems with final *e* constituted about 10 percent of all errors. Most of these errors were caused by the subjects' failure to differentiate between long and short vowels in their written form (e.g. pine /pan/ versus pin /pɪn/). This type of error is another major familiar type of misspellings in English.

Mispronunciation, faulty handwriting and slips of the pen constituted proportionally equal numbers of misspellings (around 8 percent). The handwriting problems which were counted as misspellings were of two sorts: errors with the formation of letters and problems with the spacing between words. Some students wrote uppercase and lowercase letters in the same shape for M/m, N/n, or T/t, except for their relative size, and that, not always. This signifies both lack of care and wrong handwriting habit developed over a long time.

Under “slips of the pen” were counted those misspellings which were unlikely to be related to a lack of knowledge. Most of these errors were with the final letter in words like him (spelled *hi*), and this (spelled *thin*). Such errors must be corrected during revision and proof-reading. However, as the blank sheets meant to be used as first drafts showed, some students (about 30 percent) did not take the trouble.

4.5.2 *Inter-group differences*

The major trouble-makers for all the subject groups were the vowel letters which constituted 24.94 percent of the misspellings of GW1, 25.61 percent of the misspellings of GW2, and 18.82 percent of those of AW (Table 10 above). Second and third were wrong analogies between words, and consonants (for AW, final *e* was third). So the three groups seem to have followed similar patterns in their major errors.

The differences between GW1 and GW were of little significance. Between GW2 and AW,

however, significant differences were observed in the number of most types of misspellings. The greatest differences were observed with misspellings over consonants and wrong analogies between words. The latter may be attributable to AW students' more experience with English vocabulary and greater ability to tell some similar words (e.g. there/ they're or special/ especial/ spatial) apart. The same type of error shows an increase from GW1 to GW2 (from 15.5 percent to 21.57 percent), which may be due to the initial increase in the vocabulary knowledge of the students as they move toward the end of their first year of studying English at university.

Errors related to suffixes, the final *e* and mispronunciation dropped to almost half for GW2 compared to GW1 (see Table 10). The latter two may be related to the assumed initial improvement in students' pronunciation of the English words they spell. Last but not least were the errors due to handwriting, which unexpectedly, doubled from GW1 to GW2 (Table 10 above). It is difficult to attribute this to any dropping pattern, except to less concern with the appearance of one's writing. However, it seems more accurate to relate this to individuals' learned incorrect habits which were formed long before they entered university, and have not been rectified ever since.

5. Conclusion

The results of the study have shown that despite time and effort exerted in writing classes, these courses do not lead to significant improvements in the students' performances on various aspects of punctuation and spelling.

Considering the limitation of time and the huge amount of material to be covered, it certainly would not be feasible to include the teaching of handwriting, spelling or punctuation in an academic writing class, at least as it is currently practiced as such. A recommended alternative is to encourage students' active participation and peer-cooperation in acquiring these and similar aspects of writing through interaction with authentic texts. It would also be advisable to put more emphasis on editing and proof-reading in all courses which involve writing in the foreign language. One way that we as teachers of writing courses and researchers have noted over teaching such courses during years is that one of the best ways is to make students sensitive to the formalities of writing. Many Iranian students feel that first and foremost in writing is the content of their writing that primarily needs attention than punctuation and spelling which they assume as the surface form of their writings. This lack of attention to punctuation marks can also be traced back to the teachers of their writing courses in their native language, Persian composition courses in high school

in Iran, where most teachers attend to the content than smaller details such as mechanics of writing. In fact, in such courses students are called to read their compositions orally instead of being submitted to their instructors for detailed correction. As the present research suggests, the use of some basic aspects of language cannot always be prescribed to learners as such. Instead, it would be more fruitful, as well as more time-saving, to help learners develop a keener language consciousness.

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Appendix 1: Test Material Used in the R-P Task

Student's name:.....
Course taken:.....

Dear student:

Thank you for taking part in this test! The following sentences/paragraphs are typed entirely in lower-case letters, and they lack punctuation. Provide capital letters or any punctuation marks (. : ; ? ' " / - () , ...), where you see appropriate.

1. napoleons aggression soon led to a resumption of hostilities with britain but his preparations for invasions were abandoned after the battle of trafalgar napoleon then marched into vienna and beat the austrians and russians at austerlitz 1905 these two blows established his empire
2. the question is given british naval superiority and the fact that britain is an island did napoleon represent a real threat to britain
3. the question remains as to whether or not napoleon represented a real threat to britain
4. hey thats mine
5. i like fish and chips and every friday night I buy some for my tea
6. by translating the anti freeze gene into other species researchers have created more fish that can survive in extremely cold water
7. television programs for teenagers are usually embarrassing although some are excellent
8. there does come a point in other words where you have to use your common sense
9. brontës first work jane eyre was swiftly followed by her best novel villette
10. april june september and november all have 30 days
11. i looked at his old haggard face
12. austens *persuasion* tells the story of annes love for captain wentworth
13. the dog wags its tail
14. americas stars and stripes are well known
15. the teachers strike showed no sign of ending

16. its been raining here all day
17. i need to buy some twelve inch nails
18. we headed for the south east to enjoy the great sun
19. dickens wrote two semi autobiographical novels *david copperfield* and *great expectations*
20. mary was fast approaching her sixtieth birthday however she had no intention of retiring
21. everyone knows hamlets famous soliloquy to be or not to be
22. now look here he said theres a limit to my patience but Ill make the assumption that you are only joking and with that he threw me out
23. charles dickens 1812 70 was born and died in england
24. an alien is a creature from outer space an inhabitant of another planet or galaxy
25. the evening went by quickly we talked listened to music read normal evening activities
26. it was simply a pass fail exam
27. true false questions are not a reliable measure of comprehension
28. study chapter 12 esp pages 245 through 264
29. ms rosenick please provide me with the full street address of dow chemical co in midland michigan
30. the texas economy throughout the past decade has been directly affected by opec policies

Appendix 2: Rater's Reference

Rater's Reference

I. Full Stop (period)

1. Napoleon's aggression soon led to a resumption of hostilities with Britain, but his preparations for invasions were abandoned after the battle of Trafalgar. Napoleon then marched into Vienna, and beat the Austrians and Russians at Austerlitz (1905). These two blows established his empire.

II. Question Mark

2. The question is, given British naval superiority and the fact that Britain is an island, did Napoleon represent a real threat to Britain?

3. The question remains as to whether or not Napoleon represented a real threat to Britain.

III. Exclamation Mark

4. Hey! That's mine!

IV. Comma

i. Punctuating linked main clauses

5. I like fish and chips, and every Friday night I buy some for my tea.

ii. Setting off an introductory element of a sentence

6. By translating the "anti-freeze" gene into other species, researchers have created more fish that can survive in extremely cold water.

iii. Additional and subordinate clauses at the end of sentences

7. Television programs for teenagers are usually embarrassing, although some are excellent.

iv. Subordinating and parenthetical elements inserted in a sentence

8. There does come a point, in other words, where you have to use your common sense.

v. Appositives

9. Brontë's first work, Jane Eyre, was swiftly followed by her best novel, Villette.

vi. Commas between items in a series

10. April, June, September and November all have 30 days.

vii. Commas between two or more adjectives that equally modify the same word

11. I looked at his old, haggard face.

V. The apostrophe

i. The possessive and singular nouns

12. Austen's *Persuasion* tells the story of Anne's love for Captain Wentworth.

13. The dog wags its tail.

ii. The possessive and plural nouns and proper names

14. America's stars and stripes are well known.

15. The teachers' strike showed no sign of ending.

iii. Contractions or omission of letters

16. It's been raining here all day.

VI. Hyphens

17. I need to buy some twelve-inch nails.

18. We headed for the south-east to enjoy the great sun.

VII. The Colon

19. Dickens wrote two semi-autobiographical novels: *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

VIII. The Semicolon

20. Mary was fast approaching her sixtieth birthday; however, she had no intention of retiring.

IX. Quotation Marks

21. Everyone knows Hamlet's famous soliloquy: 'To be, or not to be.'

X. Speech Marks (double quotation marks)

22. "Now look here," he said, "there's a limit to my patience, but I'll make the assumption that you are only joking." And with that he threw me out.

XI. Parentheses

23. Charles Dickens (1812-70) was born and died in England.

XII. The Dash

24. An alien is a creature from outer space – an inhabitant of another planet or galaxy.

25. The evening went by quickly. We talked, listened to music, read – normal evening activities.

XIII. The Slash

26. It was simply a pass/fail exam.

27. True/false questions are not a reliable measure of comprehension.

IV. Abbreviations

28. Study chapter 12, esp. pages 245 through 264.

29. "Ms. Rosenick, please provide me with the full street address of Dow Chemical Co. in Midland, Michigan."

30. The Texas economy throughout the past decade has been directly affected by OPEC policies.

From outside in: from inside out; student's expectations and perceptions of culturally different teaching styles.

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Abstract

Significant curriculum reform has been undertaken in Hong Kong for over a decade. There has been substantial education initiatives designed to enhance Hong Kong students' English proficiency. The most prominent initiative has been the introduction of the Native English Teacher (NET) Scheme. However the effectiveness of the collaboration between local English teachers (LET) and NETs has not been critically investigated with respect to student expectations and perceptions of their teacher's culturally developed teaching styles and how these perceptions impact on classroom learning expectations and behaviour.

This paper seeks to engage in a critical analysis of the pedagogy used by LETs and NETs in a local Hong Kong primary school setting. In this paper, it is intended that light will be shed on the implications of the pedagogy and cultural factors relating to primary school students' perceptions of those factors that support effective English learning in Hong Kong ESL classrooms.

Introduction

While there is a growing body of research related to students' perceptions of the Native English Teachers in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong and in particular their value as a language model (Law, 1999; Lai, 1999; Storey et al, 2001; Carless, 2006 & Luk & Lin, 2007), there is little research that focuses on changing student perceptions of what constitutes valued teaching and learning in contexts where the pedagogy used by LETs (local English

teacher) who have had a long standing privileged ‘inside’ position in a community of practice is being challenged by the pedagogy used by NETs (native English teacher) who have a peripheral or ‘outside’ position in the same community of practice: inside out; outside in.

Background

NET schemes are not new to East Asia. A large scale JET scheme (Japan exchange and teaching program) has been operating since 1987 and another parallel but smaller scale EPIK (English program in Korea) scheme started in 1996. The NET scheme in Hong Kong was first introduced in 1986, all be it in a capacity limited to fewer than thirty secondary schools to broadly enhance the English standard of students as part of the Expatriate English Language Teachers’ Scheme (Law, 1999). The scheme was modified in 1989 but did not expand until it was reintroduced in 1995 and later across the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) in 1998 at the secondary level (Boyle, 1997). The scheme was introduced into primary schools in 2002 (Employment and Manpower Bureau, 2006).

Historically, Hong Kong is a former British colony and at that time English was given the status of the official language: a language of the law courts, professional jobs, business and higher education. Its significance as a language increased as Hong Kong rapidly developed as a financial and international city in the 1990’s (Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, 2003). Following the reunification with mainland China in 1997, the status of English in Hong Kong remains highly regarded as a prestigious language because it is seen as essential to maintain Hong Kong’s status as a world class city and an international financial and business centre (Standing Committee on Language and Research, 2003). In all government subsidised schools, English is a compulsory subject from primary to senior secondary school and a pass in English is mandatory for entry into tertiary education.

In order to ensure that Hong Kong students have the capacity to adapt to rapid changes and demands in the global social and economic developments, a mastery of English is seen as a vital component (Standing Committee on Language and Research, 2003). The NET scheme was one strategy designed to support and strengthen English language learning and teaching by providing amongst other things an authentic environment for children to learn English, developing innovative learning and teaching methods suited for local students as well as disseminating good practices in language learning and teaching (EMB, 2006). The NET strategy has often resulted in team teaching between NETs and LETs and it is becoming a

common feature of schooling in Hong Kong (Carless, 2006).

The term team teaching defined in this paper as simply two or more teachers planning for and sharing the teaching of students in the same classroom, has become a feature in those government schools that participate in the NET scheme in Hong Kong (Carless & Walker, 2006). It is seen as an effective means of nurturing English communicative competence (Tajino & Tajino, 2000) because as Carless (2006) found, it offers the potential for the unique and complex knowledge and experiences of NETs and LETs to be exploited profitably, despite the associated problematic issues of linguistic imperialism (Canagerajah, 1999) and neo-colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). How teachers construct and use knowledge about teaching and learning as they develop their own classroom pedagogy is highly interpretive, socially and culturally negotiated and continually reconstructed in the different schools and classrooms where they work. (Clandinin, 1986; Bullough, 1989; Grossman, 1990). This in turn has a profound impact on how their students learn and listen especially in a context where different sets of culturally interpretative frameworks influence perceptions and experiences of what constitutes learning and teaching and how this is translated into prevailing pedagogy (Scollan and Scollan, 1995; Young, 1996; Ellsworth, 1997). Interpretive frameworks differences in Hong Kong classrooms often reveal a fundamental tension between the pre-reform nature of teaching curriculum premised on the 'Three T's', teacher-centred, textbook centred and test-centred (Adamson and Morris, 2000) and the nature of the current reform requiring a strong focus on teachers being more facilitative and autonomous as well as the use of more western teaching and assessment strategies (Curriculum Development Council, 2004).

This tension has often been perceived as a binary of opposites; Chinese students attaching unquestioning acceptance of teacher's knowledge (Murphy, 1987) in contrast to western beliefs and practices which emphasise learner independence, inquisitiveness and informal relationships with teachers (Ting, 1987). A more balanced perception is that students have undergone diverse prior experiences and how they have been socialised into learning and teaching will reflect personality differences as well as the contexts in which they were educated (Lortie, 1977). As Littlewood (2000:34) found, Asian students including those from Hong Kong, want to explore knowledge and discover their own answers. They want to do this together with their fellow students in an atmosphere which is friendly and supportive. Littlewood (2000) further suggested that if Asian students have adopted a passive classroom attitude, it is more likely to be a consequence of the educational context provided.

Research Purpose

While Hong Kong students have traditionally encountered a more teacher transmission approach (Adamson, Kwan & Chan, 2000), more recently other approaches to language teaching and learning are now evident including a Communicative Approach to Language Acquisition or CLT (Carless & Walker, 2006). We wanted to understand in one local government primary school context where a loose team teaching partnership exists, the impact of the methodology used by a LET and NET on their students' learning expectations and in-class behaviour. The justification for this small scale case study is that it represents 'illuminatory instances' (Holliday, 2002) whose purpose is to focus on the implication of the methodologies used in relation to students' expectations and perceptions. It offers as a case study through the 'voices' of teachers and students, an insight into some of the pedagogical and cultural factors that have the potential to support effective English learning in Hong Kong ESL classrooms..

Methodology

In order to be sensitive to and respectful of the beliefs and practices of the students and teachers and at the same time gain insights into their stories in education as revealed to us, we chose a case study. Semi structured interviews and classroom observations supported by detailed chronological observations notes were the main data collection tools.

Sampling

We approached through different channels the principals of several government subsidised primary schools that appeared to be representative of how the NET scheme had been implemented in Hong Kong primary schools and in addition might have been willing to accept researchers towards the end of the academic year. Only one principal responded and two teachers from her school volunteered to provide us with classroom observation and interview time. The LET daily taught English language to 3 classes of primary students in year 2 and year 4. The NET taught the same year 2 and 4 classes a weekly oral language lesson based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This had been determined by the Principal and was based on a NET scheme requirement of providing authentic language environments in which to learn English. The two teachers planned together so that wherever possible the oral language content the LET sought to develop in her students could be enhanced and expanded amongst the students they shared.

Further, we interviewed three students from each of the six classes these two teachers

taught. The two teachers selected students from a cross section of ability groups and English language backgrounds. The students were selected on the basis of having demonstrated confidence to talk to the LET on yard duty in Cantonese.

The LET Ms. Sarah, (name selected in keeping with a common practice amongst LETs to use an English given name) was the Head of the English Department. The other teacher (Ms. Emily, anonymous) was the NET. The two teachers had completed the required teacher training to be appointed to teach their subjects in government primary schools and had approximately 20 years teaching experience between them.

Data collection

The two teachers were tracked over the same two school days during English language sessions with the shared year 2 and 4 classes, but several weeks apart. We conducted one round of semi structured interviews with the students and two rounds of semi structured in depth interviews with the teachers in both weeks. All the interviews were held immediately after English language classes. The purpose of the first round of in depth teacher interviews was to gain insights into their culturally and socially determined teaching and learning beliefs and then through the second round, to gain insights into their attitudes and beliefs about learning and teaching English in a Second Language context. The purpose of the student' interviews was to illicit their perceptions and responses to the culturally different teaching approaches and styles. To avoid communication difficulties, student interviews were conducted in their first language; Cantonese.

We used video lesson recordings to gauge how teachers and students were interacting with each other and to understand how the various methodologies and activities used had an impact on student engagement. A total of eighteen lessons each of 45 minutes were observed for both the LET and the NET. Detailed field notes were made giving chronological descriptions of teacher and student interaction and behaviour during lessons. Evaluative comments and issues for clarification were noted to be followed up in the formal and informal interviews.

Data analysis

We adapted a form of the 'phenomonologically' approach to analysing interview data, proposed by Hycner (1985), because it presents a clear process of reducing and analyzing interview data. We streamlined his original 14 steps as follows:

1. Transcription

2. Phenomenological reduction - a summary of the meaning made of what was said
3. Delineating units of general meaning relevant to the research question and eliminating redundancies – effectively crystallizing what is important to the research question
4. Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews – highlighting summaries from step 3 (Hycner, 1985)

The above steps 1-3 focus on individual interviews and step 4 collates the interviews from all the interviews conducted.

Semi structured interview topics

The student interview questions were structured to illicit how students behaved in English classes conducted by the NET and the LET. The student interviews were conducted in Cantonese: the students' home language . The interview questions focused among other things on:

1. What teaching activities best supported their English language learning
2. When and why they used Cantonese or English in English language classes
3. Reasons why and when they might prefer to be taught by either the NET or the LET.

Similarly semi structures interview questions were used with the LET and NET to illicit how their beliefs have influenced their practices. The interview questions focused on among other things:

- Beliefs about effective English language teaching and learning
- How they support and encourage students to have a go
- Impact of prior experiences and teaching requirements on what and how they teach

Findings

The findings revealed a diversity of student perceptions and expectations relating to what they valued as appropriate teaching and learning which have in turn had a significant impact on their in-class learning behaviour. For instance, the culture of teaching and learning taken up by some local students was premised on their belief that the primary role of a teacher was as an authority figure and their major role as students was to receive, absorb, and digest the knowledge transmitted by the teacher (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Holliday, 1997). This was in direct contrast with western teaching and learning methodologies designed to facilitate active student engagement coupled with a heightened

degree of learner independence. (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Such a disparity of perspectives is indicative of different cultural interpretative frameworks and prior learning experiences that have socialised students into learning and teaching. These perspectives offer an insight into some of the pedagogical and cultural factors that support effective English learning in Hong Kong ESL classrooms.

The NET

Ms. Emily often used a CLT approach because she was familiar with it and because she felt it enabled her to provide effective learning support even though she could not use Cantonese to explicitly teach a key learning point. She believed that the use of gestures, voice and realia to model meaning would scaffold her teaching point and assist her students to overcome a communication difficulty. She said in relation to this;

...I don't use anything that I don't think I can make comprehensible through a range of strategies which includes using the voice to make noises and using realia, pictures and so on. Today that meant using the 'cha cha' sound of a train in the song, the discussion and the game. I use lots of demonstrations to model the language and then build in opportunities for the students to use the patterns in their talk such as I told the story up to a certain point and then asked the students to complete it using the repetitive structures and vocabulary.

In another lesson, she had her students recall a previous narrative story they all enjoyed to expand the idea that in narratives, animal characters can take on human attributes and for some readers this could be a surprise (E1, 1:30). She modeled the target language from the previous story before students listened to similar target language in the new story.

T: Nice to see you all again, 4A. I'll read you a story today. Before I read it, I want to remind you of a story you all know. What story? You know it. What story? (Showed a picture of the students' favourite characters on the title page)

Ss: Donkey, dragon.

T: Donkey and dragon. Excellent. The donkey and his dragon. This is a funny story...remember a good story has surprises. What is surprising in the story?

S: Donkey talks.

T: That is a big surprise. Yes, the donkey talks. Right. What is another surprise?

S: Dragon like donkey.

T: Mr donkey and the dragon pulled Shrek out of trouble. That's surprising. There is another big surprise. What else surprised you?

While Ms Emily had a degree of freedom in what and how she taught as she did not directly prepare the students for the high stake examinations, she had never the less been given a particular teaching / learning responsibility by the Principal. This responsibility related to creative writing which had recently been introduced into primary curriculum by the Curriculum Development Council (2004). Related teaching processes were not always well understood by local teachers and students were not able to effectively write creatively. She said,

This year I have been asked by the school to focus on creative writing because students have in general not done well in this area on their exams. In fact my colleagues often comment on how difficult it is to teach writing, let alone creative writing.

Her students were not aware of the importance of her teaching focus nor were they aware that it was now an important component in high stakes examinations such as the Basic Competency Assessment and the Hong Kong Attainment Test.

Ms. Emily used learning tasks that she described as ‘fun and highly student centred’ such as games. Her teaching did not follow the suggestions laid out in one of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) recommended textbooks most government subsidised schools have purchased and teachers plan and teach from (Chien and Young, 2007). Nevertheless, she believed that putting fun into learning had the potential to motivate students and achieve positive student learning outcomes with respect to the goals laid out in the Curriculum Guideline (2004). She said;

I always plan to give the students some input that is interesting and hopefully they will be interested in talking about this. I hope this encourages them to say something and talk in class, so I try to include the teaching point in the story, game or whatever I use to make the meaning and focus comprehensible. I think this will provide them with a reason to follow and as they follow and become involved in the activity they will use English.

In her lessons, she often used popular realia to introduce a text. In the excerpt below, she has moved from introducing the target language related to the concept of ‘surprise’ to introduce the storyline in ‘The paper bag princess’ (E2, 2:47-5:25) to motivate her students to listen and make meaning as she reads them the story.

T: We’ll read a story today which has a big surprise too. Let me pull the story out. I will show you something. What is it? (She pulls out a paper bag)

Ss: A bag.

- T: Yes a paper bag. What can you use a paper bag for? Some ideas? What do we use this for?
- S: Put things in.
- T: Put some things in. Absolutely great, Ron. Like this? (Mimes putting some things into the bag)
- Ss: (laughter)
- T: What else? What else can I do with a paper bag? I know. I can make a dress for you!
- S: (laughter)
- T: Would you like a dress? I need to take some scissors. Have you got scissors?

She used a western culturally mediated approach loosely based on Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis (Krashen, 1987) to facilitate meaning making. Her pre-reading activity scaffolding supported her students to communicate in English in response to her questions.

While Ms Emily used a western culturally mediated framework to develop and engage her students, she was not entirely free in what she chose to teach as she had been given a brief by her Principal. However, what and how she carried out this brief was very different from how her LET colleague implemented her classroom practices. Ms Emily still had freedom to select each text and introduce them as was evident above in relation to the realia she chose.

The LET

In contrast, Ms Sarah was predominately responsible for teaching the curriculum. It was expected that she would draw on the specific EMB approved textbook that her school had purchased. She often drew heavily on the methodology and activities set out in this textbook as she prepared her students for high stakes examinations. As McClelland (1994) found elsewhere in Hong Kong, the pressure to be the best school at all times is as high as the consequences of failure is serious. Schools and LETs feel compelled to prepare their students for these examinations and it was therefore not surprising that LETs feel compelled to closely follow the textbook lesson plans. Ms Sarah said,

We have a textbook and I follow the units and topics. I teach them the key words and structures and then ask them to do the writing (exercises).

She adhered to the texts chosen. On this occasion 'The Gingerbread Man' was the text and she introduced this concept in a very structured manner as set out in the textbook.

- T: OK, let's start. What is the title of the story? (Pointing to the title)
- S: The Gingerbread Man.
- T: The Gingerbread Man. Can you say this after me?
- Ss: The Gingerbread Man.
- T: OK now look at the cover again. I would like you to guess how many characters are there in the story? Sam? You said six...

At the same time, she is well aware of the limitations that the textbook imposes both on her teaching and the students learning and has developed a response to this. She continued;

There is a lot of variety in the textbook, but I do not think this is enough. I want to bring in more and I have decided that I will focus on reading so they read more and open their eyes to widen their language knowledge and explore.

In response, she has been influenced by the NET in that she has begun to introduce a more innovative learning and teaching approach premised on her perception of a student skill shortfall (creative writing). To scaffold this, she draws on a wider range of materials and activities largely beyond the textbook. Ms Sarah said that she has begun to;

...use role plays after they (students) read because they like this very much. Time is limited but when I have time I will ask students to take different roles. They like drama and even if they have done this with the NET, we always do role plays and drama and I ask them to create the story and they have to add onto their story after reading it.

In another one of her lessons, she asked the students to rewrite the ending for the Gingerbread Man story then role-play their ending

- T: I would like you to rewrite the ending because I do not like this ending. I love the Gingerbread Man even though he is naughty. Garry do you like the story ending?
- S1: (shakes his head)
- T: Why not?
- S1: Because the Ginger Man is so hmmm...
- T: The Gingerbread Man was so....
- S: Sad.
- T: You do not like a sad ending Garry? I see we want a happy ending. It's happy for the frogs. How about you Agnes, what do you think?
- S2: No I do not like sad endings because I think the Gingerbread Man is lovely, but he is die the end. I think this ending is not good.

T: Oh you do not like the ending because he died, right? Now I have some more questions for you. Hmm..the Gingerbread Man stopped at the river. What was the problem?

She asked her students a series of leading questions about what could happen. She also showed them a series of related power point pictures. Her objective was to use the students knowledge and pictures to stimulate them to think of their own ending. This was not an activity recommended in the text book but one she had developed from her professional discussions with the LET.

She knows that her students are only beginning to learn English and she needs to motivate and encourage them so they will try to make meaning and not loose interest. For that reason, Ms Sarah said that she speaks to her students for between 60 to 70% of the time in English, but will use Cantonese for explanations when they may not understand.

Further she has developed a range of strategies to encourage the students speak in English. She said:

When they begin to speak in English, they are shy and speak very softly and then I will ask them to try what they can. If they can not speak, I ask them to tell more in Cantonese and I will give them the English.

In a 'picture flick' activity to reintroduce the Big Book called 'Ghosts witches and things like that' (Hunt; 1984), with her grade 2 class, she demonstrated how she motivated and encouraged her students to be active English language learners through a form of code switching.

Excerpt (E66:23/06/06)

E: Look at this picture. What do you see from the picture?

Ss: Book, fire (suggestions / noise)

E: Okay, thank you very much. Guess what this is? What is this (pointing with her hand).

Ss: (suggestions / much noise).

E: Okay, it's a frog. Yes, how do you know it? Oh yes, you can see it here. The frog is very cute, isn't he?

S1: 點解隻青蛙咁幸運? (Translated: Why's the frog lucky?)

E: He is lucky because he is the king. He says I am the king of this castle. Oh, he is the king. But why? Why is he the king? Can you guess?

S2 Maybe the king...the frog ...(student falters)

S1: 女皇將皇帝變成青蛙. (Translated – the queen makes the king become a frog.

T: Oh, you are so clever! Good try.

The teachers used classroom practices that drew on different culturally mediated frameworks. The LET at times felt compelled to use a methodology and activities prescribed in the text book but at other times she had adapted strategies used by the NET. The NET drew on her past experiences that were both ideologically and culturally developed. As such their learning and teaching practices are indicative of a diversity of influences that have shaped for them what constitutes teaching and learning.

Student expectations and perceptions to teaching

Many students spoke about a diversity of cultural expectations and perceptions as well as their personal interests when they described their response to the different teaching styles and the impact these had on their classroom behaviour.

Teaching style preferences

As with many students in Chinese learning contexts, some students had attached great importance to the role of the teacher as the bearer of knowledge. Further, the same students expected a prescriptive teaching style requiring with strong teacher direction. One student spoke about the value she had placed on the particular teaching style she was comfortable with:

Our goal in the classroom is to study, since we are not here for fun, even if it may be easier to memorise the information through games. If we play games all the time, we may only memorise small amounts of words and if we keep playing games, it will be easy to forget everything. I believe the only way to learn and achieve good academic results is to pay attention while studying (translated) .

This student expected the teacher to impart knowledge, rather than requiring the students to engage in activities designed to apply their learning in authentic ways. This student expected to learn the rules and be provided with modeled examples and then to recall and use these in teacher-set exercises and assessment tasks.

For instance, one of the observed NET lessons focused more on using communicative tasks. Clearly the students perceived this activity as a “game” and fun (E2 43:05).

T: It’s easy to play, you are right! I can put them all up. But you can think of more terms,

too! You can use this. I'll throw the ball to a friend! Then you say, I am or I am not good at blar blar blar...The your say. If you say the same one, you are out! In this game, you should ask a new question.

S: Okay!!

T: And remember, throw gently. Are you ready?

Ss: Yes!

T: Are you ready?

Ss: Yes!

T: Okay, let's play! Are you good at riding a bicycle?

S: Yes, I am good at bicycle.

T: Riding a bicycle... any questions?

S: Are you good at singing?

S: Yes, I am good at singing.

S: 抛比我! [Translated: Throw it to me!]

T: Question?

S: Are you good at throwing the ball?

S: Yes, I am good at throwing the ball.

S: Are you good at...?

S: ..Reading a book!

This kind of lesson activity was common and many students were motivated and actively using the appropriate language form. Such activities however would have been confronting for those students who did not accept this style of teaching and learning. It would have initially at least negatively impacted on their active engagement.

The valued teaching content

Many students in Hong Kong also expect their English Language classes to have a strong focus on grammar. One girl mentioned;

I think grammar is very important and it must be done correctly in class. Ms Sarah teaches us good grammar and I like her to teach us.

Her expectations were further supported by another student who said;

If we want to use good English we need to have a good grammar and vocabulary. We need to learn grammar because the examinations are all about grammar.

Grammar and vocabulary are highly valued by students especially in relation to examinations

as well as their perceptions of what English language users in Hong Kong are good at (Young, 2006).

The LET however placed more emphasis on her students developing an understanding of the prescribed vocabulary. She would begin by using English to explain new vocabulary items to students then Cantonese to make sure students understood the meaning. In the example below she wanted her students make meaning related to the concept of a magical spell (C1, 36:44)

T.: Now I am going to be a witch. See? (She puts on a witch's hat). I have a hat and I am witch. I will make a spell.

Ss: Wow

T: Yes, **ma ne ma ne hom**. I want to be a witch. Who can read the spell? Who wants to be a witch? I will invite three students to come out and tell me a spell. First listen. I am going to make a spell. Are you ready?

Alternatively, she would use multiple questions or gestures to illicit students' response to check on their understanding of the vocabulary. In the excerpt below, she introduced the students to the concept of a 'Gingerbread man' biscuit

Excerpt (1:) (11 am 23/06/06

T: I would like you to smell this. (Holds up a small piece of ginger) Smell! It is ok? What is this?

S1: Ginger.

T: Are you sure?

S1: (nods head vigorously.)

T: Can someone else try? I have something else for you to try. OK close your eyes. What is this? (She takes out a Gingerbread Man biscuit)

S2: (Smells and tastes) Sweet

T: Sweet?

S2: (laughs)

T: Are you sure? Ok, Any one else wants to try?

S3: Tissue

T: Tissue?

Ss: (laughter)

T: Actually this is yellow colour, with a very strong smell. What is it?

S4: Ginger

T: But have you ever eaten this? Do you know what it is? Look. (Holds up a picture of a Gingerbread Man from a story book) Don't you know?

S5: Biscuit. Gingerbread Man.

T: Oh yes, that's it! You can all have some Gingerbread Men to share at the end of the lesson.

While the students understood the English word ginger, they were not familiar with Gingerbread Man biscuits. She used an experiential approach with supporting questions and appropriate language modeling so students could explore this concept to make meaning in the story.

How students view their role in language learning

Some students felt that they needed to focus on taking notes for later study and revision during teacher input. A boy said;

As a student I have to take notes and then memorise the information that our teacher Ms Sarah gives us. If we do not do this, we will have a hard time studying for our examinations and future.

These students had an expectation about the ways in which they would should use the information being imparted. For them, the teacher is the authority. What the teacher says and does in the lesson must be used as given out in the lesson. Hence students believe that memorising and following precisely the language patterns will assist them prepare for their examinations.

The value placed on the textbook

Most LETs follow the recommended study sequence and lesson outlines laid out in the selected EMB approved textbook and the students expect that their teachers would follow the presented model of language. Ms Emily did not use a textbook and some of her students believed that she did not really teach or facilitate learning. This was despite the fact that most students enjoyed playing games and described her classes as fun. One student said;

I like Ms Emily's class because it is fun. We play games and we relax in class. The games are new to us and interesting. But it's not studying and reading from our textbook. I do not feel happier in Ms Emily's class because I think traditional study is good. Her lessons are not the regular syllabus.

Such a value placed on beliefs about what constitutes English teaching and learning means

that students claim they have not learned much from their NET, especially if the teaching does not focus on the prescribed textbook syllabus. Several students spoke about what they consider to be valued learning activities. One said;

I think Ms Emily is soft because her lessons are not the regular syllabus. And we play games. Ms Sarah teaches us the textbook stuff and we don't have games very often.

Another female students added that,

I feel better with Ms Sarah because we study and read from the textbook. She uses the textbook more. This is traditional study and I think it is good.

At times these students are not comfortable with the fact that Ms Emily was not guided by the textbook and even though many students enjoyed the 'fun' activities she provided, they were not yet willing to accept an approach outside their experiential framework. This would seem to relate directly to what Littlewood (2000) found elsewhere that if Asian students are passive this is likely to be a consequence of the educational context and in this case the students have had several years of exposure to textbooks and how other teachers follow them with a singular purpose.

Classroom expectations and use of Cantonese

In this school as in most Hong Kong Primary schools, all subjects except English and Mandarin are taught in Cantonese. Further, most students live in Cantonese speaking communities and rarely hear or use English outside the classroom. It is understandable then that students expect to use and hear Cantonese in class. Many of the primary level students were not confident English communicators. They were more comfortable using Cantonese to express their ideas. A boy said;

Sometimes we are given some questions that we can't answer by ourselves. Ms Sarah will answer for us in English. However if we still do not understand what to do, then she will use Cantonese. Sometimes when we have some English words we do not know how to pronounce, we will use Cantonese for that part and use English for the rest of the sentence. She allows that.

In the context of the Gingerbread Man story, Miss Sarah wanted the students to understand the action, to stir.

T: They want to make one Gingerbread Man. They found what they needed and they measured it and then... (Shows a picture of the ingredients being stirred in a bowl)

S1: I can't see it.

T: You can't see it?

- S1: Stir
- T: What's stir? Can you show me?
- Ss; (Demonstrates stirring)
- T: How do they do it? (Teacher draws on the board and writes using an anglicized version of Cantonese). If this is the bowl, they put things in it and stir. (Teacher mimes). Stir?
- S1.: Stir
- T: That's right. They stir.

This boy then went on to explain how Ms Sarah had developed other ways for her students to communicate in English and not lose face if they could not do this. He said;

If I know the answer, I will answer it in English. If not, I will raise my hand and ask Ms Sarah if I can answer it in Cantonese. If I do not know how to answer I will ask, Ms Sarah, 'Can I speak in Cantonese?' If she does not allow us to speak in Cantonese, she will come closer and I will ask her how to say the word in English and she'll whisper in my ear and teach me the word in English.

Most students spoke about how they react when they understand English and want to respond;

I raise my hand higher to let the teacher know and see that my hand is higher than the others. I may stand up or raise my body and then the teacher knows that I know the answers.

Others are not comfortable or confident yet to communicate in English. One student indicated that she would almost speak gibberish and;

...say something not related because I do not like to say I do not know. I feel bad if I answer 'I do not know'. Sometimes I cry because I was frightened and shy. I do not have the guts to answer the question. I am afraid my class mates will laugh at me.

She is afraid of losing face and will try almost anything in the hope she is seen to be a capable communicator in English.

However, Ms Emily can not communicate in Cantonese. A girl said;

Ms Emily can't explain to us in English and we can't understand all she wants us to do. Ms Emily always speaks to us in English even if we do not understand.

Indeed, all the interviewed students alluded to a sense of frustration because they had come to expect a high level of L1 learning support.

Interests and contradictions

Apart from culturally determined expectations and perceptions, the students often spoke about their personal interests. It was at this point some contradictions were revealed in relation to how they narrated their expectations and related classroom behaviour. Despite of the fact that the students expressed a preference for textbook based lesson, some student found these lessons very boring, especially around examination time when students were drilled in preparation. One girl said;

Some English lessons are boring before the exams. These lessons are not as much fun and we are not happy.

In this regard, many students have come to expect that their lessons should be interesting, especially as they find that lessons based on the textbook are often repetitious and boring. They enjoy the motivation of realia and activities they perceive as interesting .

We play games in Ms Emily's class and she is very funny. She tells us jokes and creates fun with us. She even asks us to bring our favourite dolls to class and then we throw around our dolls.

This is in keeping with Littlewood (2000) who found that Asian students want to explore knowledge themselves and find their own answers. Most want to do this with their class mates and in an atmosphere that is friendly and supportive.

Discussion

The findings above are indicative of diverse experiences and culturally interpretative frameworks that influence perceptions and experiences of what constitutes learning and teaching. This has implications for language teaching and learning in a context undergoing significant curriculum and assessment reform premised on western learning models. The case study found that there were times when the students had different sets of cultural expectations from the LET and that these were likely to affect their motivation and satisfaction in relation to the teaching and learning.

This small scale case study further revealed much about student response's to teaching and learning experiences that often did not match their cultural expectations of what they viewed as appropriate teacher behaviour. Ms Emily's western pedagogical norms and expectations clearly did not always match those of all her students. Similar findings have been reported elsewhere by Shepherd & Gilbert (1991), Phillipson (1992), Widdowson (1994), Holliday (1994) and Zhang (1995). Students had attended 'school' for at least 3 years, others for

longer and they had been socialised into what for them constituted formal learning and teaching. While most students enjoyed learning English, some students how the NET taught and managed their learning was confronting and often incongruent with their expectations. Then these students did not value the curriculum and pedagogy. It was seen as a soft option in comparison to the curriculum and pedagogy the LET provided. These students indicated that they found playing games frustrating. This frustration was heightened by the fact that they knew they had to prepare for examinations and believed that their best chance to perform well through learning and teaching based on the textbook.. They also expected to remain passive; having their heads filled with knowledge much in the manner of the 'banking concept' of education (Freire, 1974). Indeed as Oatley (1984) found elsewhere, the disparity between western approaches and student expectations in the teaching and learning lead some to assert that they did not learn much from these lessons.

In addition, the NET was not able to communicate in Cantonese and some students indicated that they experienced learning difficulties as a result and as Tzu (1996) found elsewhere, this could have inhibited these students from committing themselves for fear of being wrong and loosing face. It could also be as Littlewoods (2000) found was a consequence of the educational context provided and when the LET was aware of this dilemma, she often gave these students some Cantonese support that enabled them to complete the exchange in a satisfactory manner.

In contrast to what detracted from the students learning experiences, when the LET and the NET provided culturally appropriate support, additional scaffolding and used familiar realia to introduce a language teaching point, many students were motivated to become active language communicators. This would seem to support Littlewood's (2000) finding that most Asian students want to explore and try out the knowledge for them. When they were able to do so, most students were highly motivated to have a go and enjoyed the interaction and learning challenges provided. For instance, some students found a more traditional teacher centered approach based around activities set out in the adopted textbook was at times boring. Similarly, students indicated a dislike of drilling close to examinations and preferred the communicative activities. Cortez and Jin (1996) found a similar response when students were provided with opportunities to talk with native speakers as English language teachers and the students became more confident speakers and users of language. Many students in the case study also enjoyed and valued the opportunities to 'have fun' and play games as they developed their English language communication skills. It was at this point the students found the classroom culture was so alluring that they were able to actively engage in the

learning activities.

While there were times when the learning support was far removed from some students' expectations and not congruent with how they thought language guidance should be provided, many students never the less enjoyed these activities. In part this was because the manner in which the LET and NET scaffolded the language structures as well as the sheer pleasure taken from being able to engage in the activities became a very motivating experience. These students realized that they could make meaning with the cues provided, draw on what they already knew and move beyond what had become for some a barrier. In this regard they were developing the capacity to become independent English language communicators

Conclusion

There was a diversity of student' perceptions about teaching and learning styles presented in class that reflect how students had been socialized into learning and teaching. This has had a profound impact on how students learn especially in a context where different sets of culturally interpretative frameworks impact on prevailing pedagogy.

For some students, their prior experiences and perceptions about what constituted teaching and learning had the potential to limit their engagement in their learning. Yet for other students, the nature of the current classroom experiences supported their active engagement and effective English learning. This was especially evident where the teaching and learning was facilitative and encouraged active student engagement underpinned by strong scaffolding and appropriate student learning support.

This raises a number of questions. Had all the students had more exposure to those facilitative and autonomous approaches used by both the NET and the LET that encouraged interest and active engagement in language learning at an earlier time in their formal schooling, would all their perceptions be positive and would they be willing to actively engage in English language learning? Fundamental educational changes are underway in Hong Kong with respect to how curriculum is perceived and organized. School based curriculum is expected to be fully implemented in primary schools very soon. Further the nature of language assessment in high stakes examinations are changing. Students are expected for the first time to undertake creative writing and oral English examinations. No longer can students rely on memorizing phrases from textbooks as they will have to draw on more authentic and autonomous contexts as they explore how to make meaning and effectively communicate. The findings above would suggest that if students are provided with an approach that effectively scaffolds and supports their active language learning as

well as draws on what they know and are interested in, the resultant pedagogy will have a motivating impact on classroom learning expectations and behavior.

In addition, where the NET and the LET are working in a loose team teaching arrangement, over time it is possible to blend aspects of how they each approach student learning support, motivation and active student language use. Had this process been happening over a longer time and had the NET also be given part of the responsibility for teaching creative writing, how then would the students perceive differences in the teaching and learning?

This case study has revealed that we still have a long way to go in exploring the influence of culture and pedagogy in learning and teaching contexts where an 'inside' community of practice is being challenge by an 'outside' community of practice specifically in relation to the impact of the different teaching and learning styles on student motivation. It has provided an insight into some of the pedagogical and culturally interpretative factors arising from one such interface that have the potential to support effective English learning in similar contexts.

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