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Teaching Spelling Skills with a Mind-mapping Software

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Abstract

Although the language program at the College of Languages and Translation offers several English language courses in the first four semesters of college, the spelling skill is completely ignored. Since many EFL freshman students are poor spellers, mind-mapping software can be used to help them connect spoken phonemes with their written forms. Mind-mapping software use lines, colors, arrows, branches to show connections between the spelling rule and examples generated on the mind map. This study shows how mind-mapping software can be integrated in EFL courses to help students discriminate different pronunciation of the vowel letters a, i, o, e, u; adding a final silent e; pronunciation of vowel digraphs; consonant letters with more than one sound; different pronunciations of consonant letters *c*, *cc*, *g*, *ch*, *s*; double consonants; homophones; homographs; hidden sounds; rules for adding affixes; assimilation; elision; acronyms and abbreviations.

Keywords: mind-mapping, spelling, phonics, sound-symbol associations, second language.

1. Introduction

A mind map is a graphic organizer in which the major categories radiate from a central idea and sub-categories are represented as branches of larger branches. It is a visual tool that can be used to generate ideas, take notes, organize thinking, and develop concepts. Teachers can use it to enhance learning. It is helpful for visual

learners as an illustrative tool that assists with managing thought, directing learning, and making connections. It is a skill that cuts across ability levels and encompasses all subject matters. It enables students to better organize, prioritize, and integrate material presented in a course. Three-dimensional mind maps are a highly effective tool for providing kinesthetic and sensory experiences for young children. Using the e-map technique gives instructors the freedom to show interrelationships between concepts and content in a very visual and nonlinear structure that benefits their students. Mind mapping has considerable utility for tracking change in the course of learning, and has the capacity of distinguishing between changes that are meaningful, and those that are not. Deep, surface and non-learning are tangible measures of learning that can be observed directly as a consequence of concept mapping (Buzan, 2000; Goodnough & Woods, 2002; Goodnough & Long, 2002; Budd, 2004; Goldberg, 2004; Stephens & Hermus, 2007; Hay, 2007; Ruffini, 2008, Howitt, 2009; Zipp, Maher & D'Antoni, 2009).

A review of experimental and quasi-experimental studies by Nesbit & Adesope (2006) in which students in Grade 4 to postsecondary learned by, constructed, modified, viewed or used concept maps to learn science, psychology, statistics, and nursing showed that across several instructional conditions, settings, and teaching methodologies, use of concept mapping was associated with increased retention of information.

In second language contexts, Chularut and DeBacker (2003) investigated the effectiveness of concept mapping as a learning strategy. Their findings showed a statistically significant interaction of time, method of instruction, and level of English proficiency for self-monitoring, self-efficacy, and achievement. The concept mapping group showed significantly greater gains from pre-test to post-test than the individual study group. Students who used background knowledge, context, morphology, and dictionaries learnt words more effectively. They adapted a vocabulary web consisting of eight identical bubbles to provide students with a word map, intertwining most of the elements to clarify word meaning as essential to vocabulary instruction (Rosenbaum, 2001). When bilingual knowledge maps (BiK-maps) were used as tools

for learning German-English word pairs by 72 undergraduates, BiK-map learners outperformed list learners on all dependent measures (Bahr & Dansereau, 2001).

Although the language program at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, offers 21 English language courses: 4 Listening, 4 speaking, 4 reading, 4 writing, 2 vocabulary building, 2 grammar, and dictionary skills courses in the first four semesters of the program, the spelling skill is completely ignored. As a result, many translation students at COLT are poor spellers. The typical freshman student misspells 41.5% of the words. Poor spellers have orthographic problems with vowel digraphs, double consonants, silent vowels and consonants. They also have phonological problems: hearing and discriminating all or most of the phonemes in a word, vowel phonemes, final syllables or suffixes, and confuse minimal pairs; confuse vowels and vowel digraphs as in: *preson, intristing, wendy, realatives, cheeper, taking, toking*; delete final silent vowels: *bridg, mils, tak, cours*; delete vowels: *anther, mony*; delete silent consonants as in: *exited*; reduce double consonants into one: *midle, wory, connects*; students tend to spell English words phonetically as in: *pepul, maind* (Al-Jarf, 2005).

Learning to spell English involves the correct association of phonemes and graphemes.

It also involves the ability to sequence, segment and transform phonemes into graphemes. The speller needs to coordinate several sources of word knowledge: phonological, orthographic, morphological and semantic (Wong, 1986).

To help freshman students master English spelling, the present study shows how EFL/ESL students can be taught to associate the spoken sounds with their written forms and how EFL students can be taught the basics of English spelling (phonics) using a mind-mapping software.

For students majoring in translation, the ability to associate the spoken sound and written symbols is important, especially because English spelling is characterized by inconsistent pronunciations, discrepancies in numbers of letters and combinations of letters used to represent sounds (Fay, 1971). Failure to retain the detailed knowledge of spellings would result in word recognition and word meaning problems. Lennox and Siegel (1998) also pointed out that good spellers use both phonological and visual

clues to a greater extent than do poor spellers. Phonological deficiencies in stored representations and in short-term memory coding were probably responsible for problems of learning disabled students (Rubin and Liberman, 1983). Students with disordered spelling have a general difficulty in processing phonological complexity (Dodd, Spranger, and Oerlemans, 1989).

2. Curriculum, Tasks and Materials

A series of graded spelling lessons can be integrated in the reading, writing and vocabulary building courses that students at COLT take. Each lesson may consist of a phoneme-grapheme rule and words illustrating that rule. Familiar monosyllabic and disyllabic words can be used. The teaching of phonics may proceed in the following sequence:

- Pronunciation of the vowel letters a, i, o, e, u (*sat, pit, pen, pot, cut*)
- Pronunciation of vowel letters *a, e, i, o, u* when adding a final silent *e* (in monosyllabic words (*car, care; sit, site, pet, pete; cut, cute; cot, cote*)).
- Pronunciation of vowel digraphs (*oo, ee, ea, ou, ai, oi, oa, au, ie, ei, ow, ew, aw, ue, ui, ua, oe, eo, io, eu, ia*).
- Pronunciation of vowel digraphs with a final silent *e* in monosyllabic words (*believe, receive, sleeve, groove, source*).
- Pronunciation of vowel digraphs with the same pronunciation (*clean, keep, believe*).
- Pronunciation of consonant letters with more than one sound such as *c, cc, ch, g* (*city, cat, clock; get, gist; accent, account; chat, school, machine*).
- Silent consonants (*chalk, walk; which, where; write, knife; listen, autumn*).
- Double consonants & geminates (*immoral, illiterate, kettle, offer; allow, arrive*).
- Hidden sounds (*nation, picture, pressure, usual, special, comprehension, decision, leisure, sure*).
- Words with two pronunciations (*present, consent, record, comment, separate*).

- Word pairs with the same pronunciation (*right, write; sight, site; fair, fare; whole, hole*).
- Words commonly confused (*affect, effect; accept, except; loose, lose*).
- Doubling consonants before a suffix such as *-ed, -ing, -er* (*planned, planner, planning; inferring; swimmer, swimming; sitter, sitting, slipped*).
- Dropping silent e before a suffix (*believe, believer, believing, believable*).
- Changing y into i before a suffix (*city, cities; lady, ladies; worry, worries; carried; worried*).
- Adding *-s* and *-es; -ed* to verbs and nouns (*buses, planned, finishes, quizzes*).
- Words with two parts of speech such as words ending in *-ate, -ment* (*comment, experiment; separate, graduate*).
- Spelling changes that take place when adding affixes such as: Dropping silent e before a suffix (*maker, making*), doubling of consonants (*sitter, planner*), adding a combining vowel (*psychological*), consonant replacement before a suffix (*describe, description*).
- Changing the pronunciation of a suffix after certain consonants as in (*plants, plans, wished, planned*).
- Flaps, reduction, vowel linkage, pause and juncture as in (*latter & ladder; winter & winner; lunch, students, lands; Did you seem ill & Did you see Mill; instead of*).
- Punctuation: use of hyphenation in compound, apostrophes, contracts, ordinal numbers.
- Acronyms and abbreviations (*NASA, UNESCO, Dr, Mrs, e.g., Eng., Am.*).
- Spelling variations: American vs British spelling (*meter, metre; color, colour; realize, realise*).

To help the students compare and contrast, make connections and recall the phonics rules, a summary lesson is given every 5-7 lessons. Minimal pair practice is also given. The written forms are always associated with the spoken sounds and vice versa. While reading and writing, examples representing spelling rules are highlighted. The students are encouraged to make their own mind maps and compile word related to

each phoneme-grapheme association rule.

3. Instructional Strategy with Free Mind

In-class spelling instruction with the mind mapping software goes through 5 stages: Orientation, presentation and modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and assessment. Each stage is explained in below.

3.1 Orientation

To help EFL freshman students categorize, visualize and recall sound-symbol associations, a mind mapping software called “*Free Mind 0.9.0*” can be integrated in in-class spelling instruction. In the first week of classes, the students are introduced to the mind-mapping software and purposes of using it. They are given the link and are asked to download it free of charge from (<http://freemind.en.softonic.com/>). The components of the *Free Mind 0.9.0* homepage are introduced and explained.

3.2 Presentation and Modeling

The instructor can train students to use the Free Mind Software using an LCD projector or a smart board. Every week the software is used to create mind maps for one phonic rule. Different types of mind maps can be created to show the pronunciation of the vowel letters *a, i, o, e, u*; pronunciation of the vowel letters *a, i, o, e, u* in words ending in a silent *e*, vowel digraphs, vowel digraphs and final silent *e*, vowel digraphs with the same pronunciation, consonant letters with more than one sound, different pronunciations of consonant letters, silent consonants, double consonants, hidden sounds, words with two pronunciations, words with the same pronunciation, words commonly confused, and so on.

A mind map begins with placing a phonics category in the middle of the screen. This phonic category is used as a basis for grouping, categorizing and sub-categorizing words sharing the same phoneme-grapheme relationship. Branches radiating from the phonic category are drawn for the sub-categories and examples sharing the same phoneme-grapheme relationship. Sub-categories, examples and

words are elicited from students, grouped into related phonics sub-categories and placed radiating out from the central phonics category.

In Mindmaps 1-6, the central focus is on vowels and diphthongs, vowels before r, silent letters, double letters, hidden letter and homonyms. Each of the main branches represents one vowel letter or an example double letters, a silent letter, a pair of homonyms. Examples of words containing a particular vowel, silent letter, double consonants...etc radiate from each main branch. Thus associations are shown in the mind map. The mind map is kept clear by using a radiant hierarchy, numerical order or outlines to embrace branches. The central lines are made thicker, organic and flowing, becoming thinner as they radiate out from the centre.

The students develop their own personal style of mind mapping. They draw empty lines, collect words and classify them. They change colors to reenergize their mind. Sometimes the students are able to see relationships and connections immediately and can add sub-branches to a category. Sometimes they cannot, so they can just connect the subcategories to the central focus. Organization always comes later. The first requirement is to get few words and categories out of their head onto the screen.

During the mind mapping activity, the instructor serves as a facilitator. She provides technical support, answers students' questions and helps with the mind maps, categories, examples representing each category in and out of class.

3.3 Guided Practice

Students practice connecting new words studied in class with the phoneme-grapheme rule that they already know using *Free Mind 0.9.0*. They keep their phonics mind maps and continue to add phonics sub-categories and words to each map, every time a lesson is covered in class. For example, they keep the silent letters map which has a main branch for each silent letter such as *h, t, s*, and words containing each silent letter. New branches are added for new silent letters such as *n & w*. With the help of the instructor, the students make word lists and add words related to each phoneme-grapheme correspondence rule mind map. New phonics categories are explored through discussion.

3.4 Independent Practice

The students continue to use *Free Mind* at home and continue to add words related to each phonics rule. The students are handed out questions that require them to group, classify or connect words sharing the same phonics rule on their own in class or at home. Mind maps can be created and added to during, and after reading texts and doing vocabulary lessons.

3.5 Assessment

Students can keep their spelling mind maps in a folder or e-portfolio. Mind maps can be also posted in an online course. Students can exchange mind maps and may work on them collectively. They can also be handed our mind maps containing phonics categories and subcategories with a group of written or spoken words to insert on the maps.

4. Conclusion

The present study shows how the Free Mind 0.9.0 software is used in grouping, categorizing, and classifying words on the basis of **sound-symbol associations**. Those mind maps can be used in introducing, categorizing, visualizing and reviewing phonics rules and as spelling mnemonic devices. Through a graphic depiction of words, these mind maps build upon what students know to help them see relationships with newly introduced phonics categories. Students develop related rather than isolated knowledge of phonics rules and develop skill in differentiating phoneme-grapheme associations in spoken and written words representing.

These mind mapping strategies have been reported to improve word and concept knowledge as well as comprehension across grade levels, in a variety of content areas, and with a variety of learners, including struggling ESL and learning disabled students. In those studies, mind mapping enabled students to better organize, prioritize, and integrate material presented in a course (Zipp, Maher & D'Antoni (2009). Students surveyed also perceived mind mapping (MM) as an entertaining and

interesting approach and thought that mind mapping enhanced their learning. Most students preferred individual MM; some preferred group MM. The teacher enjoyed using MM and thought that it fostered student motivation in learning science (Goodnough & Woods, 2002). Most of the students surveyed appreciated its use for recall and creative thinking, although some prefer a top-to-bottom, linear outline approach (Mento, Martinelli & Jones, 1999).

It is noteworthy to say that the aim of the mind mapping activity is not to teach the students how to apply the details of the *Free Mind* software. Focus should be on placing a phonics category that would be used as a basis for grouping and classifying words in the center, how to add branches for the word examples, how to change the font color, size and case.

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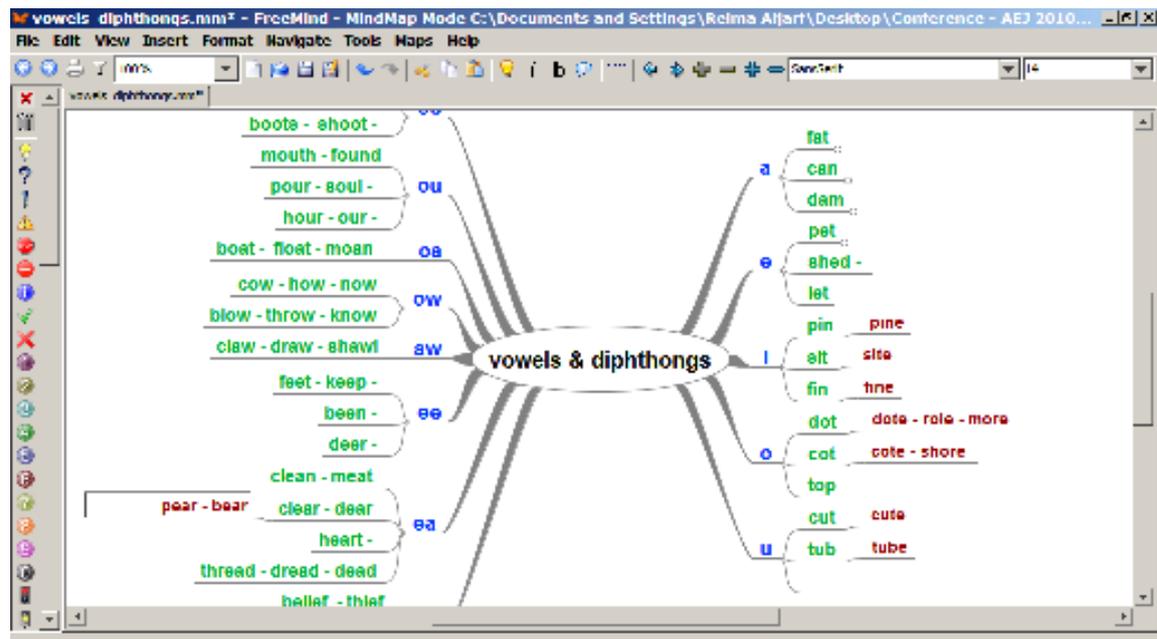
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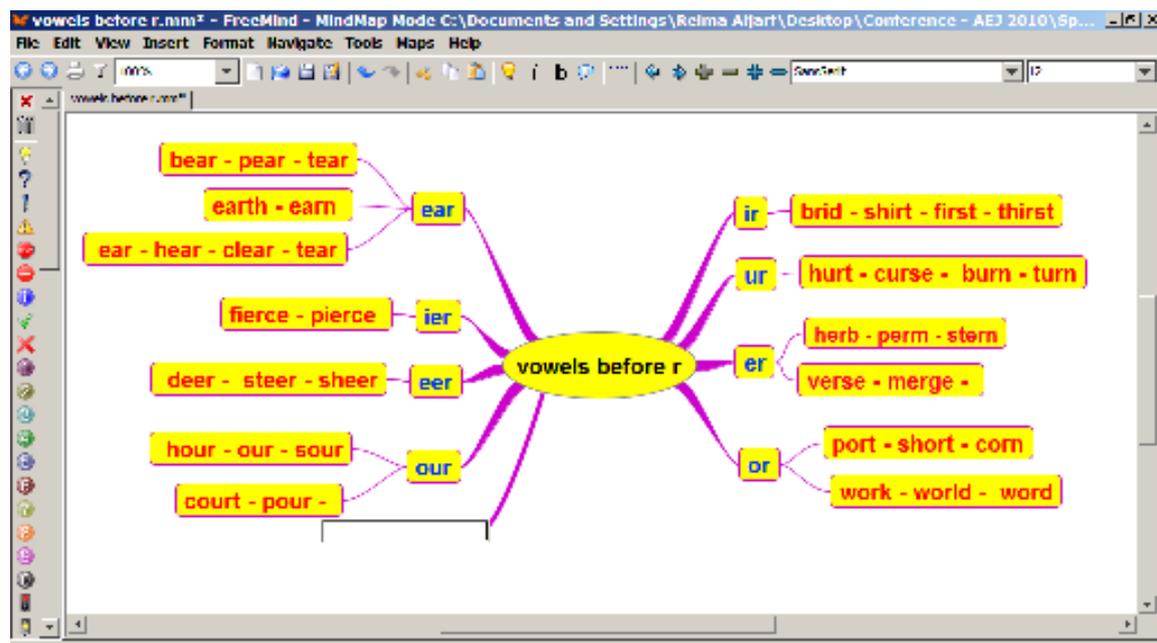
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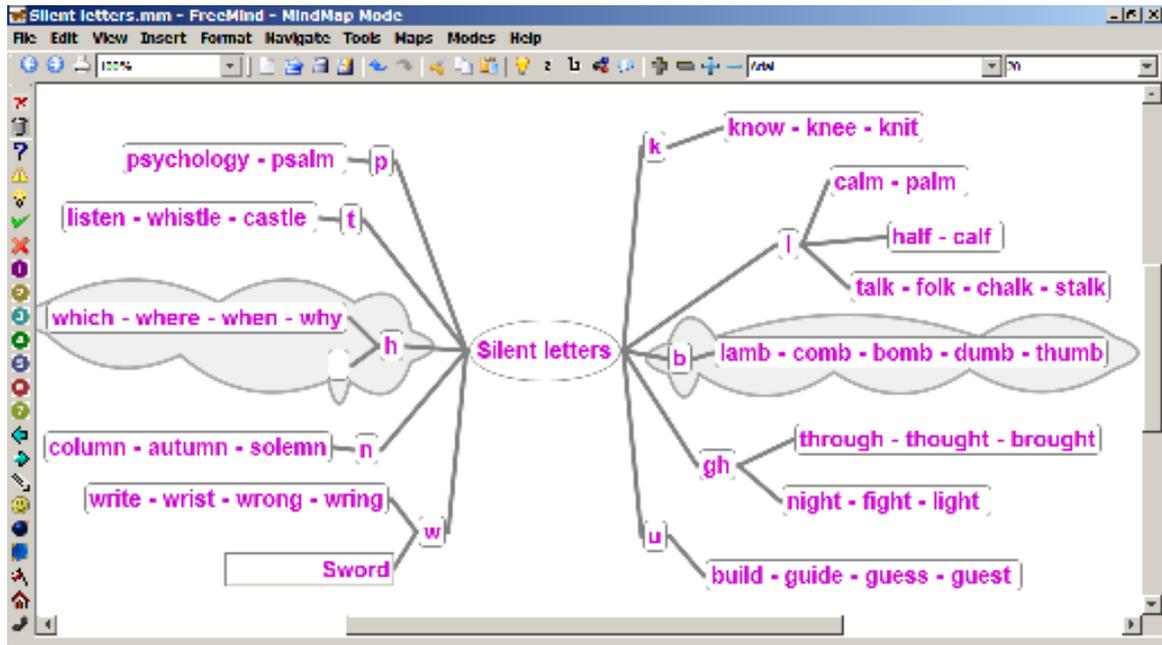
Appendix



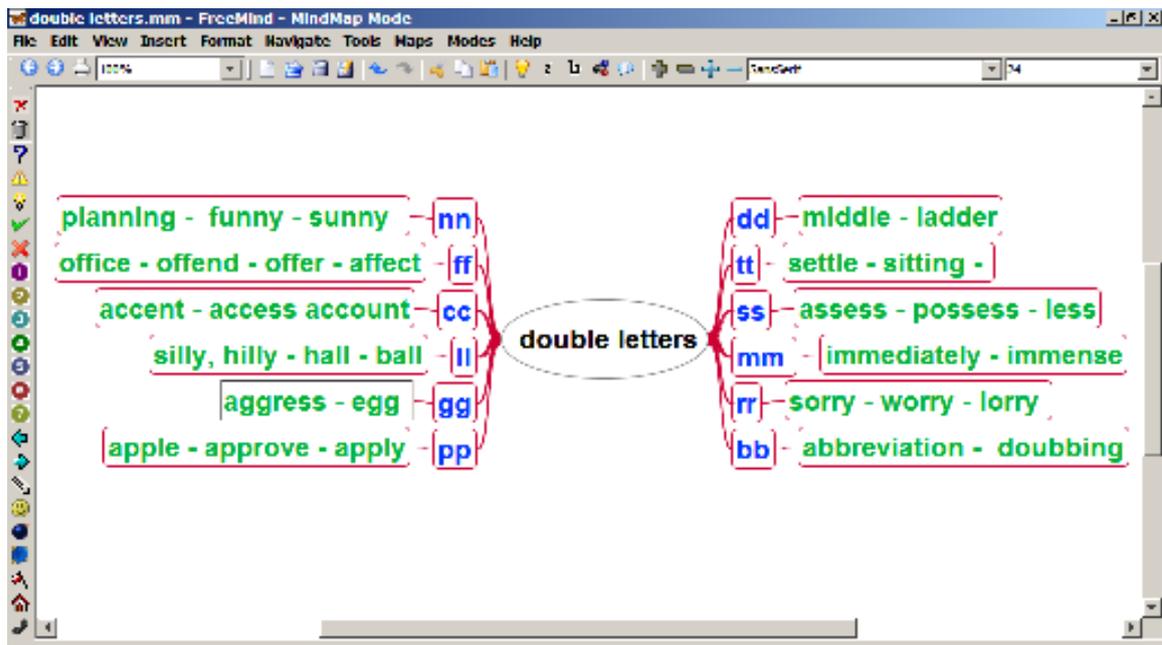
Mindmap (1) Vowels and Diphthongs



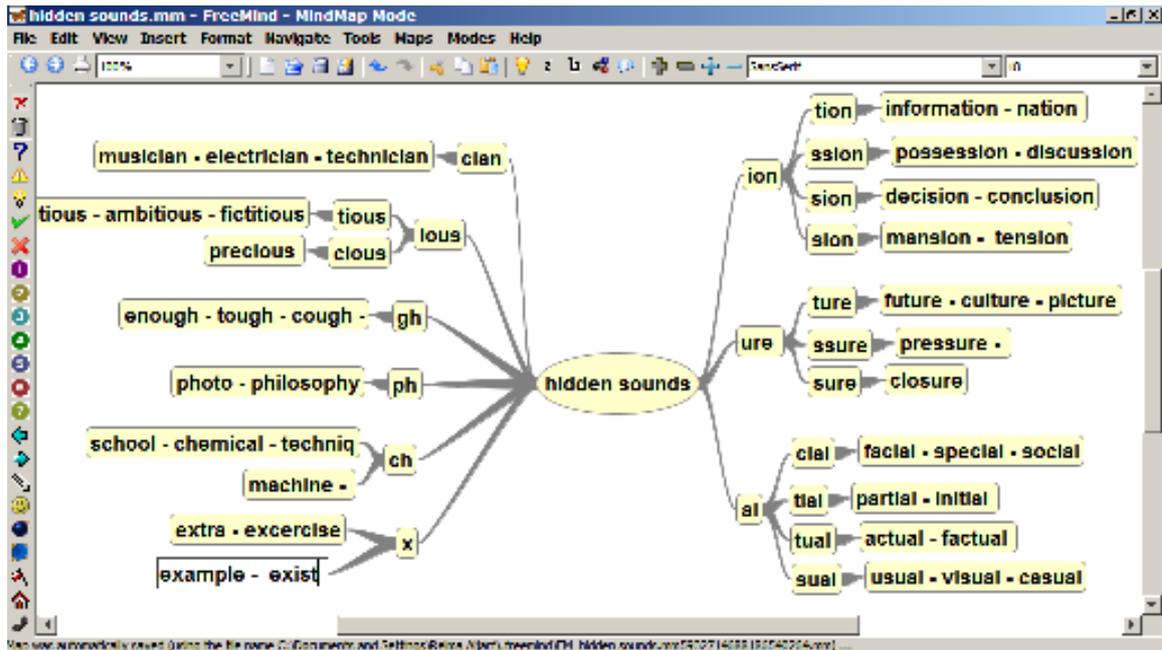
Mindmap (2) Vowels Before r



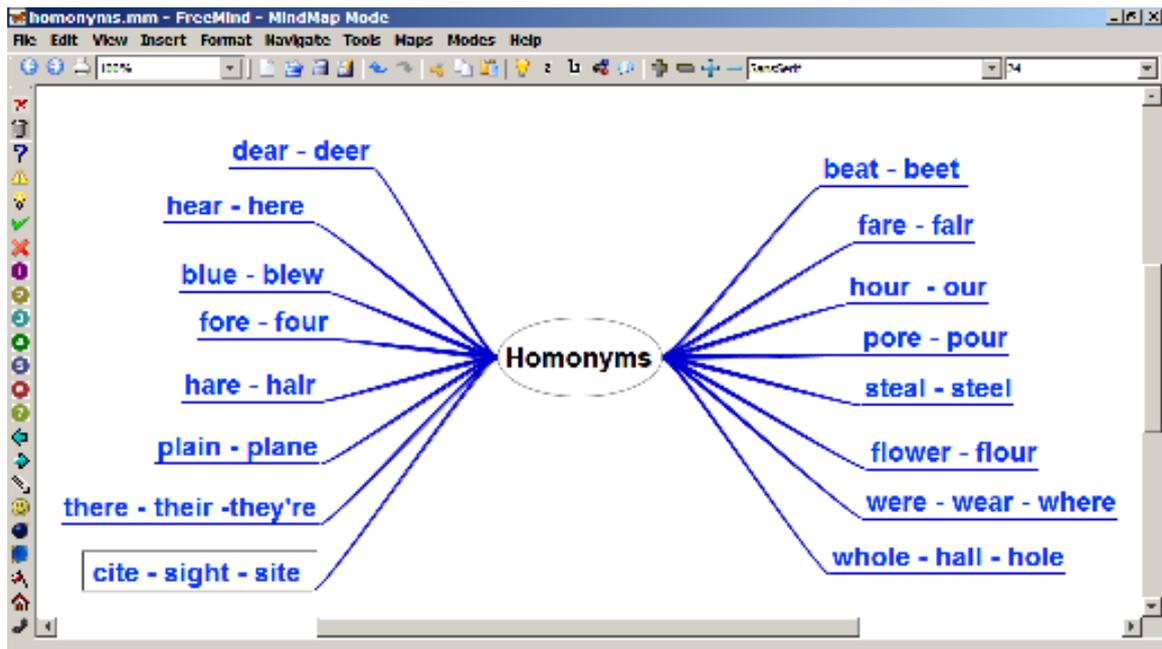
Mindmap (3) Silent Letters



Mindmap (4): Double letters



Mindmap (5): Hidden Sounds



Mindmap (6) Homonyms



EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College

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Ming Chang was born in Tainan, Taiwan. She earned her Ed.D. from Texas A & M University –Kingsville in USA. Now she is an Assistant Professor in Language Teaching Center at Minghsin University of Science and Technology in Taiwan. Her research interests include TEFL and EFL teacher training.

Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates teaching practices that develop learners' abilities to communicate in a second language. It represents a change of focus in language teaching from linguistic structure to learners' need for developing communication skills. In recent decades, many English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have adopted CLT into their curricula. The study is motivated by the review of previous literature showing that although teachers' attitudes play a crucial role in revealing their thinking about CLT and their implementation of CLT in the classrooms, few studies have focused on teachers' attitudes toward CLT in a particular EFL setting, Taiwan. The study aimed at investigating Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and the reasons behind attitudes the teachers held toward CLT.

An explanatory mixed method was used in the study. It was a two-phase research design, starting with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. The qualitative phase was used to explain the results of the quantitative phase. The results of this study indicated that the teachers held favorable attitudes toward principles of CLT and displayed characteristics of CLT in their beliefs. Also, the results demonstrated that Taiwanese college English teachers believe CLT can make English teaching effective and meaningful.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Communicative Approach, EFL, Teachers' attitudes

Introduction

In recent decades, teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have been encouraged to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to help develop students' abilities to use English appropriately in context. CLT advocates teaching

practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To improve students' abilities to use English in real contexts, CLT has been adopted in the settings of EFL colleges (Littlewood, 2007). However, the theories and practices of CLT have faced various challenges in many EFL contexts (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Takanashi, 2004; Yu, 2001).

It is clear that teachers' attitudes are important in their decision to implement CLT. The reason for the mismatch between CLT theory and practice may be teachers' attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1995). Since teachers' attitudes reveal teachers' thinking about teaching language, the investigation of teachers' attitudes serves as a starting point to identify the possible contradictions between teachers' beliefs and CLT principles. Littlewood (1981) suggests that the idea of the communicative approach may conflict with EFL teachers' existing thoughts about teachers' roles and teaching methods. Thus, to implement the relatively new communicative approach in Taiwan, it is important to investigate Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT.

Literature Review

Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was proposed by Hymes, who claimed that the study of human language should place humans in a social world. The definition of "communicative competence" is what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate in a speech community (Hymes, 1972). For example, in the real world, not only would a speaker produce a grammatical sentence, but he/she should consider the situation in which the sentences are used. According to Hymes (1972), competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses" (p. 13). That is, the concept of communicative competence involves knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context.

Hymes (1972) proposed four sectors of communicative competence. First, "whether or not something is formally *possible*" refers to the notion of grammatical

competence. It is concerned with whether an utterance is grammatically correct. Second, “whether something is *feasible*” deals with its acceptability in addition to being grammatically possible. For example, some grammatical sentences cannot be part of competence because of the restricted ability of human information processing. Third, “whether something is *appropriate*” means that a sentence should be appropriate to the context in which it is used. Finally, “whether something is in fact *done*” implies that a sentence may be grammatically correct, feasible, appropriate in context, but have no probability of actually occurring (Hymes, 1972, p. 14).

Communicative competence is a complex notion that involves linguistic as well as sociocultural sectors. From proposed definitions, it can be concluded that communicative competence consists of knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and strategies to cope with for the use of language.

The Historical Background of CLT

The emergence of CLT occurred at the time when language teaching was looking for a change (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Due to the unsatisfactory traditional syllabus that failed to facilitate learners’ ability to use language for communication, linguists attempted to design a syllabus to achieve the communicative goals of language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Wilkins’s (1976) notional syllabus had a significant impact on the development of CLT. To support the learners’ communicative needs, Wilkins (1976) included communication function in a notional syllabus. Notions refer to concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, and frequency. Communicative functions refer to language functions such as requests, denials, offers, and complaints (Wilkins, 1981). Based on the notional syllabus, a communication language syllabus consisting of situations, language activities, language functions, notions, and language form was developed. As a result, the design of foreign language syllabus focused on a learner-centered and communication-oriented language instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Characteristics and Principles of CLT

CLT has been popular and widespread in second and foreign language teaching. It highlights a radical change of the traditional structured teaching methods which have lived through history. Contrary to the teacher-centered approach, in which teachers are regarded as knowledge givers and learners as receivers, CLT reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner.

The learner-centered approach gives students a sense of “ownership” of their learning and enhances their motivation (Brown, 1994). CLT emphasizes the process of communication and leads learners to different roles from the traditional approach. The role of the learner is negotiator between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. Learners are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make themselves understood and in understanding others within the classroom procedures and activities. In this way, they contribute as well as gain in an interdependent way (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Teachers take particular roles in the CLT approach. First, the teacher facilitates the communication process between all participants in the classroom. The teacher is also a co-communicator who engages in communicative activities with the students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, the teacher acts as analyst, counselor, and group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Rather than emphasizing the explicit explanation of grammatical rules, CLT pays less attention to the overt presentation of grammar (Brown, 2007). However, CLT does not exclude grammar. CLT suggests that grammatical structure might be better understood “within various functional categories” (Brown, 2007, p. 242). In CLT classes, both accuracy and fluency should be taken into consideration in language teaching, but the aim is to build fluency. However, fluency should not be built at the expense of clear communication (Brown, 2007). During fluency-based activities, errors are considered natural and tolerable (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Conceptual Framework of Attitudes

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) propose a conceptual framework of attitude construct

which consists of four categories: cognition, affect, conation, and behavior. In the framework, attitudes are a function of beliefs. In other words, beliefs have causal effects on attitudes. Typically, a person learns a number of beliefs about an object by direct observation or information from outside sources. People hold a set of beliefs about the object, and these beliefs serve as the basis that determines their attitudes. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In the framework, attitudes are viewed to have influence on behavior. Specifically, a person's attitude toward an object affects the person's intentions to perform behaviors relating to that object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). However, the relation between attitude and behavior depends on particular conditions. That is, when the person thinks he/she has more resources and fewer obstacles, he/she is more likely to perform the behavior according to his/her intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) indicate that behavior can be determined by intentions; intentions are the results of overall attitude, and attitudes are a function of salient beliefs. However, these causal effects not only work in one direction. Performance can provide new information that changes beliefs, attitudes and intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Teachers' Attitudes toward CLT

Karava-Doukas (1996) suggests that the mismatch between the beliefs and practices may contribute to the neglect of examining teachers' attitudes before implementing any new approach. That is, only promoting the approach and trying to convince the teachers of the effectiveness of CLT does not successfully change the teachers' existing beliefs about language learning and teaching. Researchers (Mangubhai et al, 1998) investigated language teachers' attitudes toward CLT in Australia. The results showed that teachers held moderate attitudes towards five factors relating to CLT, role of grammar, group work, error correction, learner role, and teacher role. The highest scores fell in the area of learner role. This suggests that the teachers think that the learners can contribute to their own learning. Similarly, in the study of Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), the teachers as a whole expressed positive attitudes toward the five

principles of CLT. The teachers held strong views about CLT in the areas of grammar role and teacher role. Karim's (2004) survey study examined university-level EFL teacher's attitudes toward CLT in Bangladesh. The findings showed that most teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT. Also, the teachers were aware of the features of CLT and their perceptions of CLT corresponded with their reported CLT practice (Karim, 2004).

In Italy, Hawkey (2006) applied both survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate whether teachers agreed with the advantages of the communicative approach in language teaching. The teachers stated positive views about CLT such as "CLT improving learner motivation and interest", and "CLT improving communicative skills" (p. 247). In addition, teachers' interviews suggested that the teachers were motivated to use pair-work activities to meet the learners' communicative needs (Hawkey, 2006).

Liao (2003) investigated high school English teachers' attitudes toward CLT in China. The first-phase survey study reported most Chinese teachers are supportive of the implementation of CLT. The findings indicated that among 302 participants, 94% responded favorably toward CLT and were willing to practice it (Liao, 2003). In the second-phase interview study, four interviewees were selected from survey participants who displayed favorable attitudes toward CLT. The teachers expressed their agreement with CLT such as, "the teacher should take into account the students' need", and "the aim of the class is to enable students to communicate easily in real life situations" (p. 125).

Chang's (2000) survey study in Taiwan investigated 110 high school English teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their practice of CLT. The results showed that Taiwanese high school English teachers hold positive attitudes toward CLT. Moreover, the teachers who hold positive attitudes toward CLT tend to use more communicative activities in their classroom practice. Liao's (2003) case study investigated two high school teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their CLT practice. The results indicated that the teachers held strong beliefs and positive attitudes toward CLT. Their favorable beliefs and attitudes led them to try out CLT in the classrooms and adopt

CLT successfully.

These research findings indicate that many EFL teachers display favorable attitudes toward CLT and the teachers' views seem to shift to a more communicative paradigm. However, a number of studies point out the teachers' concerns about CLT. Hawkey (2006) reported that Italian teachers of English think some correction of grammar and lexis errors is necessary. Li's (2004) study of Chinese teachers' opinions at a tertiary level indicated that the teachers thought that learners must be given feedback when they produce L2 to modify their production. Since the students already knew how to negotiate meaning in their first language, what they needed to learn were words in order to use them in L2 (Li, 2004). The interview data in Carless's (2004) study revealed that some students used the simplest linguistic forms to complete the tasks. Burnaby and Sun (1989) reported that Chinese college students learn the knowledge of English for future jobs in China, such as reading technical articles or translation of documents (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). This view is confirmed by Tsai's (2007) study. Taiwanese teachers also thought that EFL students have no immediate need to communicate in English. On the other hand, they need grammar and reading skills in order to learn content knowledge.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to examine Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and the rationales underlying their attitudes toward CLT. To achieve this purpose, an explanatory mixed method research was conducted. The first-phase quantitative study investigated teachers' attitudes toward CLT, while the second phase qualitative study explored the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT. The two phases of the research occurred sequentially where the qualitative data were used to explain quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The question guiding the first-phase quantitative study was:

What are Taiwanese college teachers' overall attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching?

The research question in the second-phase qualitative study was:

What are the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT?

Research Settings and Participants

In this first-phase survey study, the researcher first identified the universities in southern Taiwan that integrate CLT into the curriculum, and then took a random sample from these colleges and universities. The teachers in each school constituted a cluster; all the teachers in the selected schools constituted the sample. The first-phase quantitative study was conducted in two selected colleges in Southern Taiwan and the sample included fifty-five Taiwanese college English teachers.

The second-phase interviews aimed at explaining the first-phase quantitative results. Thus, the follow-up interview sample was selected from the population of the first-phase quantitative study. To learn the participants' in-depth thoughts and experiences, the researcher invited eight teachers to take part in the follow-up interviews. The interviewees were made up of eight teachers from the survey sample, four teachers from each university.

Questionnaire

An attitude scale was used to investigate the participants' attitudes toward principles of CLT. It was originally developed by Karavas-Doukas in 1996 with five-point scales in the Likert format (See Appendix).

The interviews

Face-to-face, semi-structure interviews were conducted in order to investigate the complexities of the participants' perceptions and experiences. During the interviews, the researcher asked the interviewees predetermined, open-ended questions, but allowed flexibility concerning follow-up questions.

Analysis of Data

Results of Research Question One

Research question one asked about Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT. An attitude scale originally developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996) to investigate

EFL teachers' attitudes toward principles of CLT was given to 55 full-time English teachers who agreed to participate in the study from two selected universities. The participants were asked about their degree of agreement with the statements in the attitude scale. During the survey, the researcher administered the questionnaires, which include the attitude scale and participants' background information, to each participant. The researcher collected 54 questionnaires from the teachers who completed the questionnaires. Only one questionnaire was not returned to the researcher. The teachers' overall attitude scores were computed with the method used by Karavas-Doukas (1996). Possible scores for the scale ranged from 120 to 24, with a neutral point of 72. According to Karavas-Doukas (1996), scores higher than 72 reflected favorable attitudes toward CLT. In this study, the participants' attitude scores ranged from 73 to 111, with a mean of 83.77, and a standard deviation of 7.86 (Table 2); therefore, it can be concluded that the participants, as a whole, hold a favorable attitude toward CLT.

Table 1

Demographic Data for Survey Participants (N=54)

Participant	<i>n</i>	%
Highest level of education		
Master degree	35	64.8
Doctoral degree	19	32.5
Major		
English literature	5	9.3
Linguistics	10	18.5
TESOL	27	50.0
Others	12	22.2
Years of teaching experience		

0- 5	14	25.9
6-10	12	22.2
11-15	11	20.4
16-20	9	16.7
21-25	8	14.8

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Attitude Scores (N = 54)

	Min	Max	M	SD
Score	73.00	111.00	83.77	7.86

In the questionnaire developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996), the items were grouped according to five subscales, or principles of CLT (see Table 4.6). To investigate teachers' attitudes toward the five principles of CLT, descriptive statistics were utilized to calculate the mean and standard deviation of each principle. In favorable items, the scale ranges from 5 to 1, with 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree". The unfavorable items were recoded, so the positive end of the scale was 5. That is, the closer the mean is to the value of 5, the more favorable the teachers' attitude. The results for the teachers' attitudes toward the five principles in the questionnaire are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Teachers' Attitudes toward the Five Principles of CLT (N = 54)

Principles	M	SD
Place/importance of grammar	3.55	.52
Group/pair work	3.32	.52
Quality and quantity of error correction	3.16	.47
The role of the teacher in the classroom	3.73	.53

The role and contribution of learners in the learning process	3.52	.48
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With the range from 5 “strongly agree” to 1 “strongly disagree”, Table 3 suggests that the teachers as a group agreed with the five principles of CLT. Among the five principles, the principle with highest mean was the role of the teacher ($M=3.73$), followed by the role of grammar ($M=3.55$), and the role of the learners ($M=3.52$). Error correction was indicated as the lowest mean among the five principles ($M=3.16$).

Results and Discussion of Research Question Two

In the follow-up interviews, the interviewees further elaborated in their own words regarding their attitudes toward CLT. Based on the findings generated from the interviews, the reasons behind the interviewees’ favorable attitudes toward CLT can be summarized as follows:

1. CLT pays attention to both form and function

Based on the findings of this study, the teachers support CLT because it is helpful to develop the students’ communicative competence as well as linguistic knowledge. The teachers’ beliefs revealed that their teaching goal is to develop the students’ communicative competence. Nevertheless, they did not exclude teaching grammar. For them, both linguistic form and communicative function are important because grammar serves as a basis for communication to take place efficiently. The teachers’ perceptions echo a number of researchers’ claims that there is value in a communicative approach which involves grammar teaching (Fotos, 1998; Littlewood, 1974; Medgyes, 1986; Nunan, 2004; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Savignon, 1997, 2001; Thompson, 1996). These studies indicated that communicative language teaching does not mean the exclusion of teaching grammar rules.

2. CLT develops language abilities through use

The findings from the present study indicated that the teachers are in favor of CLT because CLT focuses on the development of the students’ abilities to use the target

language. The teachers believed that it is essential to expose the students to the target language in order to acquire the language. To accomplish this goal, group or pair work activities are designed to promote communication in the classrooms. Communicative activities can create authentic situations where communication takes place.

3. CLT takes into account the affective variables in language learning

Although the teachers reported CLT is effective in developing the students' language skills, they took into account the affective as well as the cognitive aspect of second language learning. The findings in the study suggest that the teachers preferred CLT to traditional teaching methods because CLT creates a safe and engaged learning environment. More specifically, CLT not only enhances the learners' English proficiency, but creates a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and cooperative relationship in groups.

4. CLT develops learner-autonomy in learning process

Drawn on the findings from the study, the teachers believed that CLT can help develop learner-autonomy. The teachers in this study addressed the importance of learner-autonomy in the language learning process. CLT enables learners become autonomous when they take charge of their own learning.

Conclusion

CLT represents the current trend of college English language education that aims to develop learners' communicative competence. Although teachers play a crucial role in preparing students to communicate effectively in various situations, few studies have focused on Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT. This study was motivated to investigate Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their thinking and experiences regarding CLT practice. The findings reveal that teachers hold a favorable attitude toward CLT and display characteristics of CLT in their beliefs. Based on the teachers' teaching experience, the findings demonstrate that CLT can make English teaching meaningful and interesting.

The present study found that the teachers dislike using traditional grammar teaching

that requires the students to memorize numerous grammar rules. Instead, the teachers stated that CLT assists the students to comprehend linguistic forms and use these rules for communication. From the teachers' perspective, communicative activities are helpful for the students to practice rules in meaningful contexts.

In addition, different from the grammar translation method focusing merely on reading skills, CLT considers four skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing as integrated skills, which should not be taught separately. CLT aims to develop students' communicative competence. To communicate effectively, the students are involved in different kinds of activities that require practicing various skills to understand their peers and make themselves understood by others.

Further, CLT creates a non-threatening language environment that lowers the learners' anxiety and make class input comprehensible. In the classroom where CLT is applied, the students can develop their language as well as social skills when they work together with their group members to achieve a common goal.

Finally, in CLT, both students and teachers play different roles than those in the traditional classrooms. Instead of waiting for the teacher to make decisions for them, students take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning. Instead of being spoon-fed by the teacher, the students can explore knowledge themselves and find their own answer.

This study recommends possible directions for future studies. First, the participants in the study are from two universities in southern Taiwan; thus, the results cannot be generalized to other educational contexts. Further studies may include teachers from universities from other EFL contexts. Additionally, teachers' attitudes are based on the teachers' self-report in the study. Future studies are recommended to examine teachers' CLT practice in more detail and to examine closely how teachers' attitudes towards CLT influence their practice of CLT.

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Appendix

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses toward the Role of Grammar (N = 54)

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged.*	5 9.2%	28 51.9%	7 13.0%	12 22.2%	2 3.7%
2. Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students.	18 33.3%	34 63.0%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
3. Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.	13 24.1%	33 61.1%	4 7.4%	4 7.4%	0 0.0%
4. Since the learner comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language, he/she is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her.*	5 9.2%	22 40.8%	5 9.2%	14 25.9%	8 14.9%
5. Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach.*	10 18.5%	18 33.3%	7 13.0%	13 24.1%	6 11.1%
6. For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not the linguistic form of the students' response.	11 20.4%	25 46.2%	8 14.8%	9 16.7%	1 1.9%
7. The teacher as "authority" and "instructor" is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language	12 22.2%	25 46.2%	9 16.7%	7 13.0%	1 1.9%

classroom.					
8. The learner-centered approach to language teaching encourages responsibility and self-discipline and allows each student to develop his/her full potential.	11 20.4%	33 61.1%	9 16.7%	1 1.9%	0 0.0%
9. Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning. It is therefore an invaluable means of organizing classroom experiences.	7 13.0%	31 57.4%	6 11.1%	10 18.5%	0 0.0%
10. The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning.*	7 13.0%	18 33.3%	8 14.8%	6 29.6%	5 9.3%
11. It is impossible in a large class of students to organize your teaching so as to suit the needs of all.*	6 11.1%	20 37.0%	10 18.5%	15 27.8%	3 5.6%
12. Knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee ability to use the language.	14 25.9%	35 64.8%	2 3.7%	3 5.6%	0 0.00%
13. Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time.*	3 5.6%	23 42.6%	7 13.0%	19 35.2%	2 3.6%
14. Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.	4 7.4%	15 27.8%	8 14.8%	24 44.4%	3 5.6%
15. The Communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.*	0 0.0%	17 31.5%	22 40.7%	14 25.9%	1 1.9%
16. The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson.	12 22.2%	34 63.0%	2 3.7%	6 11.1%	0 0.0%
17. By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker.*	6 11.1%	18 33.3%	11 20.4%	15 27.8%	4 7.4%
18. For most students language is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way.	6 11.1%	33 61.1%	13 24.1%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%

19. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example. *	2 3.7%	19 35.2%	3 5.6%	28 51.8%	2 3.7%
20. Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them.	13 24.1%	30 55.5%	5 9.2%	3 5.6%	3 5.6%
21. Students do their best when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher.*	4 7.4%	19 35.2%	13 24.1%	13 24.1%	5 9.2%
22. Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue.*	5 9.2%	22 40.8%	6 11.1%	16 29.7%	5 9.2%
23. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.*	5 9.2%	20 37.0%	7 13.0%	21 38.9%	1 1.9%
24. A textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students.	26 48.1%	25 46.3%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%	1 1.9%

SA=Strongly Agree; A= Agree; U=Uncertain; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

Unfavorable statements are indicated by an asterisk (*)



Effects of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method on Japanese University Students' Pronunciation

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Abstract

Mutual intelligibility or overall comprehensibility of L2 speech has been regarded as a crucial goal in recent ESL pronunciation pedagogy. In other words, native-like accuracy has received less pedagogical attention. It is not necessarily reasonable, however, to underestimate native-like accuracy in pronunciation teaching targeting student-teachers in ESL/EFL teacher-education settings. This study, therefore, examined the efficacy of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method, which “initially exaggerates pitch contours and the duration of stressed syllables in English” (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996, p. 26), in an EFL teacher-education contexts. Subjects of the study were Japanese university students ($N=30$), and they all took part in a year-long pronunciation training. At the time of the investigation, the subjects had a plan to become EFL teachers after graduation, but their level of confidence in their English pronunciation was extremely low. Before and after the pronunciation training sessions, subjects' speech was collected and analyzed using *Praat* (acoustic-analysis software; Boersma & Weenink, 2008). In the acoustic analysis, a prime focus was put on Voice Onset Time (VOT) of voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives and pitch range. Thus, both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of L2 speech were analyzed in this study. This paper reports on the results of acoustic analysis and discusses the applicability of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method in EFL/ESL teacher-education settings.

Keywords: Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method, Pronunciation pedagogy, Voice Onset Time, Pitch range, Japanese university students

1. Introduction

Mutual intelligibility or overall comprehensibility of L2 speech has been regarded as

a primary goal in recent ESL pronunciation pedagogy. Since suprasegmental features play a crucial role in communication (see Munro & Derwing, 1995), such features as sentence-stress, rhythm, pitch, and intonation receive much pedagogical attention in current pedagogy of English pronunciation (Binghadeer, 2008; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Nagamine, 2002). In other words, the native-like accuracy of segmental features (i.e., consonants and vowels) tends to receive less pedagogical attention. It is not necessarily reasonable, however, to underestimate native-like accuracy in pronunciation teaching targeting student-teachers in ESL/EFL settings. As Ashby (2002) claims, a modern language teacher is expected to have sufficient knowledge of articulatory phonetics, a well-trained ear, and skills to analyze as well as remedy learners' articulatory errors.

As an EFL teacher-educator myself, I have encountered such dilemmas as EFL student-teachers' non-native-like pronunciation and their self-efficacy, self-confidence in model reading, or students' perceptions of EFL student-teachers' non-native-like pronunciation. Thus, ESL/EFL teacher-educators may consider both native-like accuracy and mutual intelligibility or overall comprehensibility a major goal when teaching English pronunciation to student-teachers. Based on such observations, this study examined the efficacy of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method, which "initially exaggerates pitch contours and the duration of stressed syllables in English" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 26) to instruct segmental as well as suprasegmental features of the English language to EFL student-teachers. Acoustic data was collected before and after pronunciation training sessions and analyzed in terms of two acoustic properties of L2 production: Voice Onset Time (henceforth VOT) in word-initial voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives and pitch range. Therefore, segmental as well as suprasegmental aspects of L2 speech were investigated.

2. Literature Review

It has been reported that native speakers of Japanese have unique characteristics of vocalization, and that they tend to show such characteristics in L2 production (i.e., the

speech production of English) (see Todaka, 1995, 1996). Those phenomena have been known as L1 transfer or L1 interference. Regarding the unique characteristics of vocalization of native speakers of Japanese, Tateno (1984) identified the following characteristics of voicing: (a) A tendency to tighten the throat so that the root of the tongue is raised. As a result, the pharynx is narrowed; (b) The opening of the mouth is narrow; (c) A tendency to produce rather strained voice; (d) Bad resonance; (e) Bad glottal efficiency; (f) More inspiratory noise; (g) When uttering a loud voice, they tend to yell and cannot project the voices appropriately; and (h) Less expiratory pressure. As for (h), Ishiki and Matsui (1993) add that Japanese speakers do not effectively use pulmonic air pressure in L2 production, referring to the importance of the effective use of abdominal respiration. It can thus be speculated that especially in initial stage of learning, Japanese L2 speakers produce English words, phrases, and sentences with less abdominal respiration than native speakers of English (cf., Ishiki & Matsui, 1993). Hence, English consonants such as word-initial voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives (i.e., /p/, /t/, /k/) are likely to be produced with insufficient aspiration noise (Todaka & Nagamine, 1996). Regarding (b), (d) and (e), it can be postulated that Japanese L2 speakers, especially in initial stage of learning, do not skillfully use the speech organs (i.e., they do not fully maneuver, for instance, the muscles of the mouth in order to produce English sounds). The characteristics of voicing reported by Tateno may indicate the need for Japanese L2 speakers to acquire the overall maneuvering skills of the vocal and nasal tracts, as well as phonetic realization rules specific to the English language (cf., Schmidt & Flege, 1995). Thus, it can also be speculated that the lack of speech motor control and phonetic realization rules causes Japanese L2 speakers to fail in generating appropriate acoustic properties in their L2 production (e.g., intonation contours/patterns, pitch range, etc) (see Todaka, 1993).

VOT is defined as “[t]he interval between the release of a closure and the start of the voicing” (Ladefoged, 1999, p. 125). VOT signifies the time between the beginning of “the articulatory gesture responsible for the release of a closure” and the beginning of “the laryngeal gesture responsible for vocal fold vibration” (Cho &

Ladefoged, 1999, p. 225). Namely, VOT can be considered laryngeal timing. As a crucial acoustic feature of phonation contrasts, VOT serves to separate stop categories in both production and perception. VOT has been widely used to differentiate phonetic, as well as phonemic, categories across languages (Cho & Ladefoged, 1999; Keating, Linker, & Huffman, 1983; Lisker & Abramson, 1964; Riney, Takagi, Ota, & Uchida, 2007). In addition, the ability to discriminate differences in VOT has been investigated in infants. For instance, Eimas, Siqueland, Jusczyk, and Vigorito (1971) studied one month old infants. They found that the subjects could distinguish the differences in VOT in a categorical fashion, which implies that the ability to perceive VOT differences may be innate. The infants' ability to detect cross-language VOT differences was also examined by Lasky, Syrdal-Lasky, and Klein (1975). Subjects (four to six months old infants) who were raised in Spanish and English-spoken environments could detect VOT differences across the two different languages which have differing VOT categorical boundaries. Adult learners of English who have not been raised in English-spoken environments have much difficulty in detecting or producing VOT differences due possibly to the lateralization of the brain or fossilization (either temporary or permanent) of their interlanguage system (Acton, 1984; Selinker, 1972; Todaka, 1996). These studies indicate the necessity for Japanese learners of English to learn language-specific VOT characteristics through formal instruction and/or training.

Intonation plays a critical role in communication. It is used to express speaker's personal attitude or emotion along with other prosodic as well as paralinguistic features (Nagamine, 2002). Todaka (1993) maintains that Japanese speakers of English have a tendency to produce narrower pitch excursions than native speakers of English. In other words, Japanese speakers of English tend to produce monotonous utterances. Binghadeer (2008) investigated Saudi EFL learners' pitch ranges and compared the results to those of native English speakers. She collected and analyzed both American and British native speakers' pitch ranges as well. Significant differences in mean pitch range were observed between Saudi EFL learners and native English speakers for utterances with falling intonation. No

significant differences were observed between Saudi EFL learners' pitch ranges and those of American native speakers for utterances with rising intonation, while significant differences were observed between Saudi EFL learners' mean pitch range and that of British native speakers. Like Japanese speakers of English, Saudi speakers of English have similar problems in pitch range, which might be attributed to L1 influence. Although pronunciation aspects of L2 speech have been known to be highly resistant to change when fossilization occurs (Selinker, 1992), nonnative speakers "can be taught to broaden their range of pitch to carry more dramatic changes characteristic of English intonation" (Binghadeer, 2008, p.111; Nagamine, 2002).

3. Method

3.1. Subjects

Subjects of this study were Japanese university students (freshmen; 18-19 years old; all females; $N=30$). None of them had experienced studying abroad and had received formal pronunciation training before participating in this study. They had a plan to become EFL teachers after graduation (i.e., student-teachers). Their level of confidence in English pronunciation was extremely low, and they voluntarily decided to participate in this study to improve their pronunciation. One year-long pronunciation training was carried out applying Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method. L2 speech samples (acoustic data) were collected before and after the pronunciation training sessions.

3.2. Research Questions

Research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- (a) What effects can be observed in EFL student-teachers' VOT values after participating in pronunciation training sessions?
- (b) What effects can be observed in EFL student-teachers' pitch ranges after participating in pronunciation training sessions?
- (c) What is the efficacy of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method?

3.3. Speech Material & Experimental Procedures

3.3.1. VOT

The following carrier sentence was used to elicit VOT values (msec.) of word-initial voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/).

“Say _____ again.”

/p/ --- pit, pat, put

/t/ --- tick, tap, took

/k/ --- kick, cap, cook

Three words for each phoneme (3x3) were prepared before the investigation. Before and after the pronunciation training sessions, individual subject’s speech was recorded in a sound-proof recording studio at PUK for later acoustic analysis (see Figure 1). The subjects were asked to read the carrier sentence, inserting each word in the sentence three times. Mean VOT values were calculated for each phoneme.

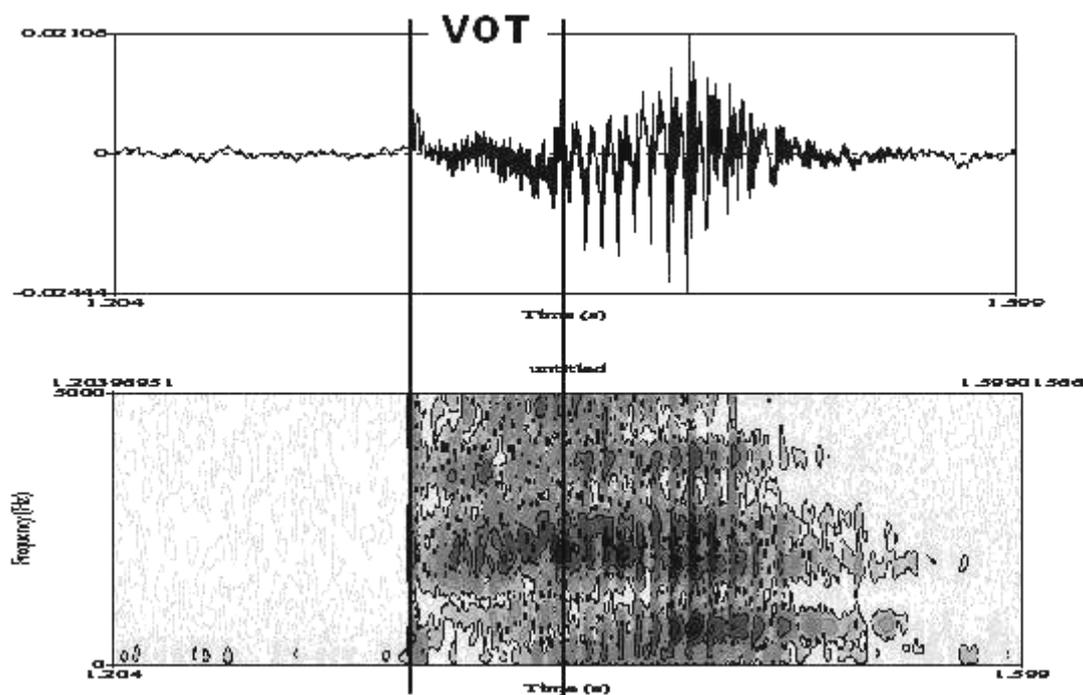


Figure 1. Measurement of VOT values (“pit”)

In this study, previously reported native speakers’ (both Japanese and English) VOT values were used as a reference in order to compare subjects’ VOT values with native

speakers of English (see Table 1). As indicated in Table 1, the data of native speakers of English and Japanese were adopted from the studies conducted by Lisker and Abramson (1964) and Riney, Takagi, Ota, and Uchida (2007) respectively.

Table 1.

Previously Reported VOT Values of Native Speakers of English and Japanese

	/ p /	/ t /	/ k /
English* (American)	58.00	70.00	80.00
Japanese**	30.00	28.50	56.70

*English data was taken from Lisker and Abramson (1964).

**Japanese data was taken from Riney, Takagi, Ota, & Uchida (2007).

A graphic representation of the data presented in Table 1 is shown in Figure 2. As you can see, obvious differences in VOT values can be observed between the native speakers of Japanese speaking Japanese and the native speakers of English speaking English.

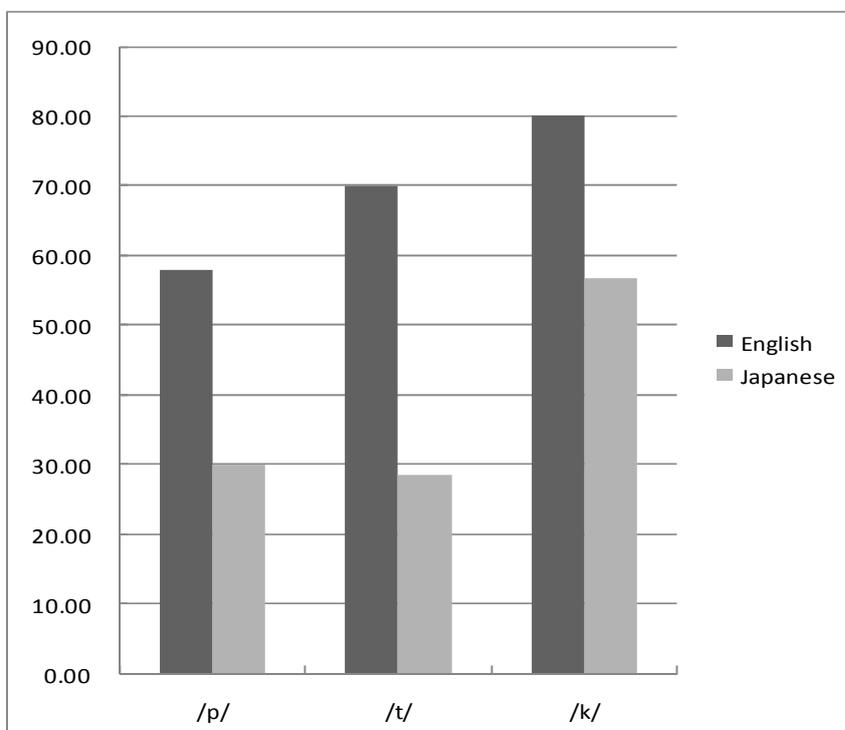


Figure 2. A Graphic Representation of Native Speakers’ VOT Values (msec.)

3.3.2. Pitch Range

Scripts from a TV show (formal MC of a tabloid TV show) and a movie (informal conversational English) were used to elicit subjects' pitch ranges. Before and after the pronunciation training sessions, an individual subject was asked to read entire scripts, and the recording was made in a sound-proof recording studio at PUK. The following randomly selected utterances from the entire scripts were analyzed in terms of pitch range (Hz; see Figure 3). The original speech data of native speakers of English was analyzed for later data comparison.

[MC] “Two very large twins and the man who squeezes himself between them.”

(Exaggerated Speech)

[Movie] “Why? You don't think I'm capable?”

(Natural Conversation Speech)

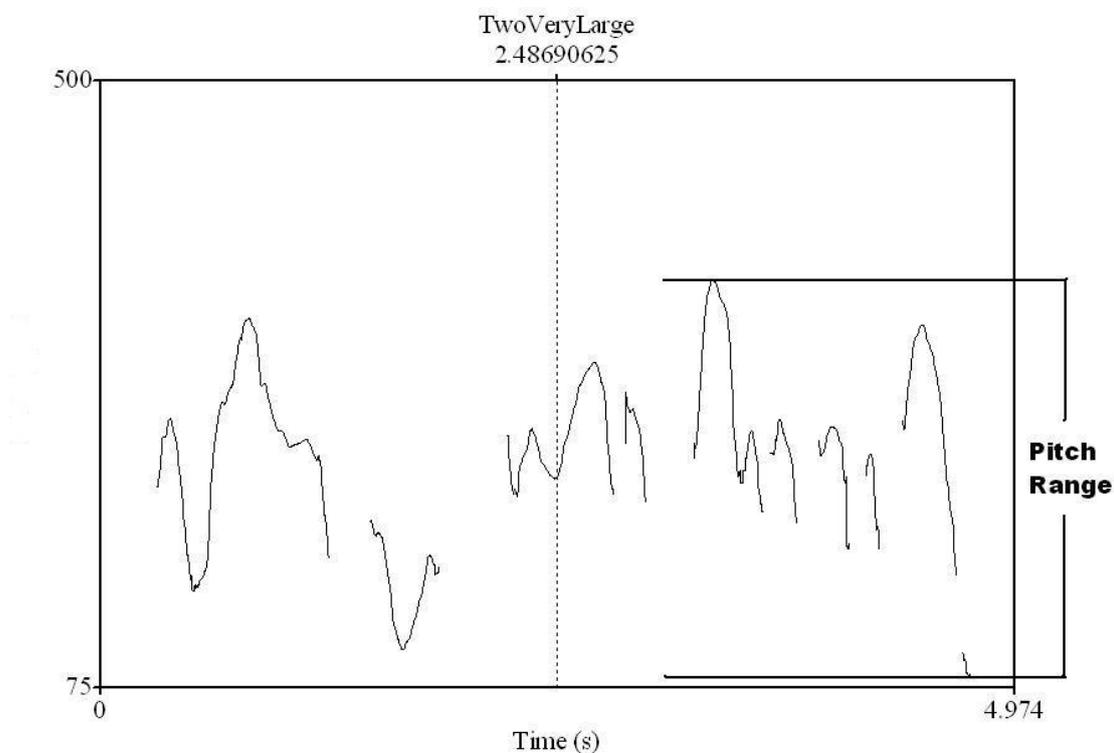


Figure 3. Measurement of Pitch Range (MC: Exaggerated Speech)

3.4. Instructional Procedures

3.4.1. Pronunciation Training: Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method

Pronunciation training carried out in this study was composed of three phases: Phases 1, 2, and 3. In Phase 1, the subjects were instructed to exaggerate their English pronunciation/articulation (exaggerated speech production exercises), to listen primarily to exaggerated speech (recognition exercises), and to become aware of English-specific sound features. In Phase 2, adjustment exercises were done to shift their exaggerated speech production to more natural conversational level production. In Phase 3, only natural conversational level production was repeatedly practiced retaining English-specific sound features. These three phases are essential components of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method (cf., Todaka & Nagamine, 1996). The method is designed to have L2 learners produce and practice L2 features of English pronunciation in an exaggerated manner, which allows them to raise their awareness of English-specific sound features. The method is known to be very effective when teaching such suprasegmental features as sentence-stress, rhythm, and intonation, because as indicated before, it “initially exaggerates pitch contours and the duration of stressed syllables in English” (Celece-Mrcia et al., 1996, p.26).

Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method focuses on learners’ understanding of basic speech production mechanism as well: aerodynamic, voice projection, psychomotor, and pitch/loudness control. The method focuses on both recognition and production practices (a dual-focus approach). The target features include, but not restricted to, aspiration and frication noises or utterances as a whole (e.g., intonation) rather than discrete articulatory points. The method takes into account learners’ self-esteem, self-confidence, risk-taking, and motivation. The ultimate goal is to promote learners’ monitoring of their own articulation, active learning, and participation. The method includes diagnostic evaluation, ongoing evaluation with feedback (e.g., instructor’s feedback and peer feedback), and final evaluation done by the instructor. A sample lesson plan used in this study is shown in Appendix A.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. VOT

A paired-sample *t*-test was implemented to see if there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the pre- and post-training VOT data. The results are presented in Table 2. There was a significant difference in the VOT values of word-initial voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives in the pre-training data (/p/: $M=34.73$, $SD=14.92$; /t/: $M=40.68$, $SD=16.73$; /k/: $M=52.31$, $SD=18.53$) and the post-training data (/p/: $M=53.43$, $SD=11.79$; /t/: $M=67.77$, $SD=10.22$; /k/: $M=80.86$, $SD=7.39$); /p/: $t(29)=-7.65$, $p<.001$; /t/: $t(29)=-9.16$, $p<.001$; /k/: $t(29)=-7.79$, $p<.001$.

As Table 2 shows, subjects' VOT values of word-initial voiceless bilabial, alveolar, and velar stops/plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/) to a great extent improved through the pronunciation training sessions. It should also be noted that subjects' mean scores of VOT became very close to native English speakers' VOT values, though individual differences were observed. In addition, the standard deviations (*SD*) of VOT values observed in the pre-training data decreased in the post-training data. This implies that the subjects of this study as a whole came to produce VOT values more constantly than before. Thus, it can be said that the pronunciation training sessions conducted in this study affected the subjects' VOT values in a positive manner.

Table 2.

Paired-Sample t-Test for the Pre- and Post-Training Mean Scores: VOT

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Training /p/	34.73	14.92	-7.65	29	($p < .001$)
Post-Training /p/	53.43	11.79			
Pre-Training /t/	40.68	16.73	-9.16	29	($p < .001$)
Post-Training /t/	67.77	10.22			
Pre-Training /k/	52.31	18.53	-7.79	29	($p < .001$)
Post-Training /k/	80.86	7.39			

4.2. Pitch Range

Paired-sample *t*-tests were carried out to see if there was a significant difference in the mean scores between the pre- and post-training pitch range data for both exaggerated level and natural conversation level speech. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3.

Paired-Sample t-Test for the Pre- and Post-Training Mean Scores: Pitch Range (Exaggerated Speech)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Training	256.14	87.65	-2.44	29	.02
Post-Training	309.22	69.75			

As for the exaggerated speech, there was a significant difference in the pre-training data ($M=256.14$, $SD=87.65$) and the post-training data ($M=309.22$, $SD=69.75$); $t(29)=-2.44$, $p=.02$. Native English speaker's pitch range for the exaggerated level speech was 376.06 Hz (minimum pitch 82.93 Hz; maximum pitch 458.99 Hz; mean pitch 239.46 Hz). Though individual differences were observed, subjects' pitch ranges of the exaggerated level speech showed drastic improvement through the pronunciation training sessions. The decrease of SD in the post-training data signifies that the subjects as a whole came to produce more constant pitch ranges than before.

Table 4.

Paired-Sample t-Test for the Pre- and Post-Training Mean Scores: Pitch Range (Natural Conversation Speech)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Training	238.29	76.58	-.0009	29	<i>ns</i>
Post-Training	238.30	57.57			

Regarding the natural conversation speech (see Table 4), there was no significant difference in the pre-training data ($M=238.29$, $SD=76.58$) and the post-training data ($M=238.30$, $SD=57.57$); $t(29)=-.0009$, *ns*. Native English speaker's pitch range for the natural conversation speech was 226.29 Hz (minimum pitch 159.34; maximum pitch 385.63 Hz; mean pitch 272.49 Hz). To reiterate, there was no significant difference in the pre- and post-training mean scores of pitch range of the natural conversation speech. Possible explanations for this finding are: (a) the subjects, while looking at the entire script of the movie, might have realized that they were expected to adjust their speech to natural conversation level production; and thus (b) the subjects could successfully adjust their speech production to suit the situation/context of the scene reflected in the movie script. The decrease of *SD* in the post-training data implies that the subjects as a whole could produce more constant pitch range than before. It should be noted here, however, that 15 out of 30 subjects produced greater pitch ranges in the post-training data than those of the pre-training data, which, in turn, signifies that adjusting pitch ranges (from exaggerated level to natural conversation level speech) might have been a challenging task for most of the subjects. Accordingly, though speculative, more than one year might have been needed for every subject to complete such a task. All in all, however, it can be said that the pronunciation training sessions affected the subjects' pitch range production in a positive fashion.

5. Concluding Remarks

A positive impact of the pronunciation training sessions was observed in the subjects' post-training data. The subjects' VOT values and pitch ranges improved greatly and became very close to those of the native speakers of English. In other words, the efficacy of Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method was confirmed at segmental and suprasegmental levels. When producing high VOT values in particular, learners are required to effectively use their abdominal air pressure as well as their pulmonic air pressure. Learners are also required to know L2 specific features as well. However, knowing those features and actually maneuvering speech organs to

properly produce L2 speech are two different things. In this regard, the subjects who took part in the year-long pronunciation training sessions demonstrated their knowledge as well as the maneuvering skills of speech organs appropriately. As mentioned earlier, Japanese learners of English tend to produce less aspirated voiceless consonants (i.e., low VOT values) and monotonous speech with less rising and falling intonation contours (i.e., narrow pitch range). Such tendencies were also observed in the subjects' pre-training data, but the drastic improvement in those acoustic properties was observed in the post-training data. Accordingly, Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method can be said to have high applicability or feasibility, especially for teacher-education settings.

Finally, there are limitations of the study. The subjects were all would-be EFL teachers. Even though their confidence level in English pronunciation was extremely low, they might have been highly motivated to learn and improve their English pronunciation. The subjects were also restricted to only Japanese learners of English. Therefore, the findings reported in this article might not extend to other English learners from differing L1, socio-cultural, and educational backgrounds. Furthermore, the subjects were all females. In other words, sex-related issues or differences were not taken into consideration in this study. In addition, although two different scripts (exaggerated speech and natural conversation level speech) were prepared and investigated in terms of pitch range in this study, the experimental condition might not reflect real-life communication situations; this holds true for the analysis of VOT values in this study. Nevertheless, on the basis of this study, it can be said that Hyper-Pronunciation Training Method can be a reasonable option for ESL/EFL teacher-educators to help would-be EFL/ESL teachers who wish to raise both native-like accuracy and intelligibility or comprehensibility levels of their L2 speech production.

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Appendix A: A Sample Lesson Plan for June 16, 2009

1. Greetings
2. Kinesthetic training & voice projection exercises
3. Description of lesson focus: awareness and recognition/production of a target feature
4. Mini-Lecture: Voiceless Consonants /p/, /t/, /k/

- (a) tongue placement (/p/, /t/, /k/)
- (b) tongue movement between articulatory settings (/p/, /t/, /k/)
- (c) group discussions among students: trying to raise awareness of L1 and L2 sound systems

5. Listening practices

- (a) instructional audio prepared for recognition exercises
- (b) pair recognition practice

6. Production practices

- (a) target feature
- (b) word-level exercises
- (c) phrase-level exercises
- (d) sentence-level exercises
- (e) choral practice



Learning English as an International Lingua Franca in a Semi-English-Speaking Country: The Philippines

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Bio Data:

Shigeru Ozaki is an associate professor of foreign language education at Takushoku University, Japan. He has conducted teacher-training courses, especially from the viewpoint of education for international understanding and language testing, at various universities in Japan. His current major research topics are how English should be taught as an international lingua franca and how international understanding is treated in university English entrance examinations.

Abstract

Some people try to improve their English in a country such as the Philippines, where English is used both as an official language and as a medium of school instruction. This paper discusses whether teachers should encourage students to learn English in such an environment. Both the advantages and disadvantages were discussed based on both a review of related literature and the author's experience of learning English in the Philippines. Several advantages were found while only a few disadvantages were identified. Moreover, the disadvantages are not very serious. In conclusion, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Learners can greatly benefit from learning English in the Philippines in various ways.

Keywords: the Philippines, semi-English-speaking country, native teachers, non-native teachers, international lingua-franca

Introduction

Should teachers encourage students to learn English in countries where English is used in many spheres of life as an official language, such as the Philippines, Singapore, or India? My colleagues and I recently discussed this issue because one of our students was planning to study English in one such country. Nowadays, some Japanese people go to other Asian countries in order to improve their English because both cost of living and tuition fees tend to be lower in these countries than in Britain, the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which are described as

English-speaking countries. Kachru (1992, p. 356) described these English-speaking countries as “the Inner Circle”, while he called the former colonies of these countries where English is used in many spheres of life as “the Outer Circle”. The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether or not learning English in the Outer-Circle countries, especially where English is the primary medium of school instruction as well as an official language, is beneficial, paying a specific attention to the Philippines.

To investigate both advantages and disadvantages of learning English in an Outer-Circle country, I visited language institutions in the Philippines and took both one-on-one lessons and group lessons with Filipino students as well as international students. I chose the Philippines for the study because the nation is geographically close to Japan, the cost of living there is much lower than in Japan, English is the primary medium of school instruction, and there are a large number of online English language programs offered for the Japanese from the Philippines.

Background

English in the Philippines

The Filipino constitution defines two official languages: Filipino and English (Bernardo, 2006). English language education was introduced to the Philippines when Spain ceded it to the U.S. in 1889, and the U.S. government made English the common medium of communication (Hayashi, 2000). Although Japan colonized the nation during the Second World War and tried to eliminate both Spanish and English, the Japanese did not have much influence on the amount of English spoken in the Philippines because Filipinos “still had to use English for propaganda movies for local consumption, as well as for other business transactions” (Viado, 2007, p. 195). English language education in the Philippines starts in the first year of elementary school, and English is used as the medium of instruction in mathematics and science-related subjects at elementary as well as secondary schools, and in all subjects at tertiary educational institutions (Nakahara, 2006). Education Secretary Jesli Lapus stated, “As the primary medium of instruction, the percentage of time

allotment for learning areas conducted in the English language should not be less than seventy percent of the total time allotment for all learning areas in all year levels” (Department of Education of the Philippines, 2010, 7). English is the dominant language in diverse areas such as education, business, politics, and the mass media (Hayashi, 2000). Nakahara (2005) investigated 121 native Tagalog speakers’ awareness of their command of English and found that they evaluated their English ability as high as 82.85 on average (Listening: 83.41, Speaking: 75.40, Reading: 90.00, Writing: 82.60), assuming that their command of Tagalog is 100. Considering the aforementioned facts, the Philippines can be described as a semi-English-speaking country if the Inner-Circle countries are known as English-speaking countries.

Recently, the necessity of having a strong command of English among Filipinos has dramatically increased due to “the development of the offshoring and outsourcing (O & O) industry,” especially “contact or call centers” (Keitel, 2009, p. 3). The Philippines is currently a leading country in the O & O industry; one of the reasons for the success of this industry there is its large English-speaking population (Keitel, 2009). “By 2010 it is estimated that the industry will have grabbed 10% of the global market share employing more than 900,000 workers....” (Keitel, 2009, p. 2). Furthermore, distance-mode English language education is an important part of the Philippines’ O & O industry (Keitel, 2009). In fact, many Philippine-based online English learning programs are available for Japanese people. English is also important for a large number of Filipinos who wish to work abroad due to the nation’s weak economy (Nakahara, 2006). For example, the total amount of money that overseas workers sent to the Philippines in the first half of the year 2002 was approximately one-third of the annual government revenue for 2004 (Nakahara, 2006). It is crucial for those who wish to work outside the nation to have a strong command of English (Kawahara, 2002). The Philippines is the leading country (48%) in Asia, after Singapore (50%), in terms of a large English-speaking population (Bolton, 2008).

Average TOEFL Score of the People of the Philippines

The average TOEFL iBT score of Filipino people was 88 out of 120 between January and December 2008, which ranked number two in Asia: This figure is very high compared to 66 for the Japanese (ETS, 2009, p. 10). Although the English ability of people from these two nations should not be compared merely on the basis of their average TOEFL scores because differences exist in various factors, such as the number of test takers and their level of motivation (Nakahara, 2006; Suzuki, 1999), their average TOEFL score strongly suggests that their English competency is very high (Nakahara, 2006). This also implies that Filipino English teachers have an excellent command of English because they need to teach English to those whose English ability is very high.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Learning English in the Philippines

This section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of learning English in the Philippines, comparing it to learning English in the Inner-Circle countries.

Advantages

1. Cost is much less: Both tuition fees and cost of living in the Philippines are much lower than in the Inner-Circle countries, which enables students to take more lessons or study for a longer period of time. Even one-on-one lessons are inexpensive there. I randomly selected five language schools located in Manila and in Sydney, Australia and investigated the tuitions for their one-on-one lessons. The result showed that the average cost for an hour one-one-one lesson at the former schools was only US\$7.25, while US\$87.93 at the latter. The low rates for private lessons enable students to learn English intensively and efficiently even when they remain in the country for only a short period.
2. Japanese students can make friends with the local people easily because both the Japanese and Filipinos are Asian. Therefore, they are able to speak English frequently in their daily lives. A large number of Japanese students who have studied in White-dominant Inner-Circle countries have told me that it was difficult

for them to make friends with the local people, and consequently, they did not have much chance to speak English with the locals except for their teachers and host families. Although this does not necessarily occur due to racial prejudice, it can be difficult to talk to someone who looks different from oneself. For example, the more racial diversity exists, the more teenagers in the U.S self-segregate by race and ethnicity at school (Bronson & Merryman, 2009, p. 5).

However, some discrimination against Japanese people could be expected in the Philippines because Japan colonized that country during the Second World War. However, I generally felt that Filipinos were quite friendly toward Japanese people.

3. Filipino English teachers in general have characteristics that offer advantages of both non-native and native teachers due to the way in which they develop their own English ability. The three components of language teachers' expertise are "skills in the target language," "explicit knowledge about the language," and "pedagogic skills" (Medgyes, 1994, p. 57). The advantages of being non-native teachers are that they have obtained explicit knowledge about the target language and they know how to help learners effectively and efficiently due to their own (systematic) learning experience. On the other hand, their disadvantage is that their own English competency can be lower than that of native English teachers to some extent. However, Filipino teachers improve their own English competency through not only systematic study of the language but also immersion environments. Consequently, their command of English can be very high: They can therefore be good models for language learners, which is another advantage of non-native teachers (Medgyes, 1994). In summary, they can help their students through both their own experience as learners and their high English competency. Needless to say, there are both native and non-native English teachers in the Philippines: It depends on the school.
4. Students can experience using English as an international lingua franca when talking to Filipinos. English is spoken as the most common lingua franca all over

the world by many more non-native speakers than native speakers, which is why English is considered to be important and is studied throughout the world. A multilingual country, such as the Philippines, is an example of a country where English is used as an international language because it is used across linguistic and cultural borders, although there is no national border (McKay, 2002). According to Kachru (1992, p. 28), the number of native English speakers is approximately “350 million”. On the other hand, the number of English users is around “1.5 billion” (Ibid.). Therefore, learners “should be aware of the existence of the different varieties of the language used by speakers outside the Inner Circle” (Yang, 2004, p. 65). They should also be able to understand the culture of countries other than the Inner-Circle countries when using English as an intercultural communication tool. Although Filipinos are non-native speakers of English, many of them have a strong command of English. Thus, students can have a valuable experience both linguistically and culturally at a very high level.

5. Even highly advanced learners can greatly benefit from participating in an English language program in the Philippines. Language institutions there offer two types of English language programs: those for international students and those for Filipinos. The level of the students who participate in the latter type of program is extremely high because they have learned and used English as both an official language and a medium of school instruction for a number of years, and now they are seeking to improve their English to the level of a native speaker for their current or prospective jobs. Therefore, I would recommend highly advanced students to enroll in a program catering to Filipinos.

Disadvantages

1. Filipino English has distinctive features in terms of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (refer to Trudgill & Hannah, 1994 for details). Due to such distinctive features, some people might consider Filipino English to be nonstandard. However, teachers in the Philippines use Standard English, although this statement is not based on any systematic research but rather solely on my own

impression. The definition of Standard English is the type of English used in writing and speaking by educated speakers of the language or taught in formal ESL or EFL instruction (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994). It also “refers to grammar and vocabulary (*dialect*) but not to pronunciation (*accent*)” (Trudgill & Hannah, 1994, p. 1). In addition, misunderstanding and occasional unintelligibility occurs even among people from different Inner-Circle countries because there exist differences among their varieties of English, and this sometimes causes them to criticize each other’s language. There are also individual differences among people from the same Inner-Circle country. Consequently, “the intuitions and judgments supplied by even the most educated native speakers are not always reliable” (Medgyes, 1994, p. 11). “And they [native speakers] seldom agree amongst themselves...” (Medgyes, 1994, p. 11). Therefore, this is not a problem unique to learning English in the Philippines only.

2. Filipino host family members are likely to speak (a) language(s) other than English to each other. Consequently, there is a fear that the amount of input at home might be insufficient for students. However, this problem can be solved if host families agree to speak only English while they are with the students.

Conclusion

This article has discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of learning English in an Outer-Circle country, especially where English is the primary medium of school instruction as well as an official language, which can be described as a semi-English-speaking country such as the Philippines. All things being considered, the advantages are found to outweigh the disadvantages, and therefore, teachers can encourage their students to learn English in such a country. The most important advantage is the great potential for exposure to the target language, which is definitely the most crucial element in successful language acquisition. When we learn English in a place where we are exposed to the language for long hours both at school and in our daily lives, we can improve our target language rapidly and dramatically. This is the most significant aspect of learning English in English-speaking countries.

Semi-English-speaking countries also provide learners with opportunity to contact English, especially as an international lingua franca, for long hours.

This article has discussed learning English only in the Philippines, although both the advantages and disadvantages discussed in this article seem to be common for other Asian Outer-Circle countries. Therefore, learning English in those countries, especially countries where English is not the primary medium of school instruction, should be investigated as well because the average English competency of people there may not be as high as that of Filipinos. Furthermore, to validate the effectiveness of learning English in semi-English-speaking countries, including the Philippines, experimental research should be conducted. The objective would be to examine whether the Japanese can really improve their English in Asian semi-English-speaking countries as much or even more than they can in the Inner-Circle countries.

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Comprehensible Input through Extensive Reading: Problems in English Language Teaching in China

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Abstract

Target language input at the right structural level and in adequate amount is believed to be a primary condition for successful second/foreign language learning. This study was designed to investigate the issue of English language input that younger learners were likely to be exposed to through extensive reading in China. Focused-group interviews and analyses of English textbooks in use and extensive-reading books on the market revealed that these learners received rather restricted English language input in terms of quantity, comprehensibility, and variety, and that input-poor, a

critical issue in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, was not addressed by the recent reform in China. The study called for urgent attention to this problem among reform authorities, school administrators, and English teachers in their efforts to improve students' learning outcomes of English and suggested the adoption of extensive reading programs as the most effective means in the creation of an input-rich environment in EFL learning contexts. Suggestions were also given to book writers and publishers regarding ways to improve children literature, story books, and other books for entertainment reading in English. This study has wider implications for other Asian contexts in which similar issues surrounding English language teaching and learning may arise.

Keywords: language input; extensive reading; comprehensible input; English as a foreign language

Comprehensible Input through Extensive Reading: Problems in English Language Teaching in China

A consensus has developed among researchers of second language acquisition (SLA) over the past few decades on the necessity of target language input at the right structural level (comprehensible input) and in adequate amount for successful second language (L2) learning to occur (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Large doses of input are especially important in the widely adopted pedagogical framework of communicative language teaching (CLT), which endorses meaning-focused instruction and pragmatic functional use of language. In the reality of English language teaching (ELT), however, the role of target language input has been addressed primarily in terms of whether it is comprehensible to students while the adequacy issue is usually neglected, which is less a concern in English as a second language (ESL) contexts, where the target language input is readily available, than in settings where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL). Past research conducted in the latter contexts identified students' lack of exposure to the target language or input-poor environment as a major problem in the learning of English (Kouraogo, 1993; Sze, 1999). Since comprehensible input in adequate amount is a primary (although not an exclusive) condition for L2 learning, its importance cannot be over-emphasized in EFL contexts.

Since the early 1990s, China has launched a series of reforms to improve English

language teaching from elementary to secondary grades (Hu, 2005). Students begin to learn English at a younger age now. In addition, CLT has been vigorously promoted by reform authorities through syllabus revisions (and lately issuance of curriculum standards) and textbook production (Hu). It has gained the status of an officially endorsed methodology (Hu) and being increasingly accepted in the classroom. If, however, changes brought about by reform have affected only how language is presented and organized in textbooks and the way teaching is carried out in the classroom, without simultaneously addressing the primary condition of language learning, exposure to adequate amount of comprehensible input, then it will be rather difficult (if not impossible) to achieve the goal of reform, improvement of student learning, to its fullest.

We therefore designed our study to investigate the state of affairs of Chinese learners' exposure to English language input following the recent reform. Since this topic was too broad and difficult to define, we narrowed it down to the target language input in the written mode with an emphasis on the input provided through extensive reading. An effective and well recognized approach for learners to receive the target language input is through reading, especially extensive reading. This study defines extensive reading as independent free reading at comfortable level (with little use of dictionaries or help from teachers) and reading in quantity, in or out of the classroom or school for the purposes of entertainment, information, or other pragmatic uses.

Extensive reading has been found to be “the single most effective way to improve language proficiency” (Maley, cited in Brown, 2009, p. 238). It contributes to students' learning gains not only in reading and vocabulary, but also writing and overall language development (Day & Bamford, cited in Brown). Although an increasing number of teachers and schools have become aware of the merits of extensive reading, it is not usually integrated as a part of the curriculum (Brown). In EFL contexts, despite of findings from numerous studies showing that extended exposure to books in general and to extensive reading programs in particular are critical for the overall improvement of learners' target language proficiency and

especially their literacy development (Dupuy, 1997; Elley, 1991, 1997; Elley & Manghubai, 1983; Hayashi, 1999; McQuillan, 1994; Ng, 1994; Tinker Sachs & Mahon, 2006), extensive reading in many cases is still excluded from the regular curriculum or extra-curriculum activities and almost totally ignored at early grades such as the elementary and junior secondary.

The overarching goal of the present research is to look into the issues of English language input, mainly comprehensibility and adequacy, through extensive reading at elementary and junior secondary levels in China and whether and to what extent extensive reading is adopted by these learners. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the sources that provide English language input in print to elementary and junior secondary students?
2. To what extent do learners have access to and utilize these sources?
3. What are the features of the language data contained in these sources?

Methodology

The study was conducted in an inland capital city in China. The researchers decided to choose elementary higher grades (Grade 5 and 6) and junior secondary lower grades (Grade 7 and 8) as the grade levels under study due to the fact that teaching and learning at these levels were less affected by examination pressures and that not all elementary schools offered English to lower-grade students. Three schools participated in the study: a private school that had elementary and junior secondary sectors, a public elementary school, and the junior sector of a public secondary school. The primary researcher visited these schools to examine their textbooks in use and other materials for instruction and learning. With interview guide constructed from the research questions, she had focus-group interviews with English teachers of the selected schools. In addition, the primary researcher visited two bookstores in the city with the largest collection of books in foreign languages to examine English prints such as books designed for entertainment reading by children of the target age group.

Data analyses began at the onset of the initial data collection. Linguistic features

and quantity of language data of the collected English texts were analyzed by examining the repetition, amount and variety of vocabulary, syntactic structures, and language functions. Content of these texts was analyzed by their readability and interestingness (such as age-appropriateness of the messages and pictures).

Findings

Amount of the Target Language Input

Results of the study showed improvement in various aspects of English textbooks in use as a result of adopting CLT. For example, the presentation of vocabulary and syntactic structures became more contextualized and the learning activities tended to be more task-based. On the other hand, the study found a shortage of English learning materials, which severely limited the amount of target language input that learners were likely to be exposed to. One uniform textbook was the exclusive source of English in most cases at each grade level all year long. Children literature, story books, or other materials suitable for extensive reading were not found to be part of instructional materials. From the interview data, none of these schools adopted an extensive reading program as an addition to their English curricula, nor was extensive reading included in English classes. In out-of-school settings such as home, the great majority of students did not read English for entertainment or other pragmatic purposes (than learning from the textbook and preparing for exams), according to the teachers we interviewed. Very few children purchased or read story books or other entertainment books in English from bookstores. Therefore, they did not receive additional input in English language in everyday life, outside the school.

Comprehensibility of the Target Language Input

In the major bookstores of the city, we found that most of the books suitable for extensive reading in English were written beyond the linguistic levels of our target learners. We randomly picked up samples from the series readers, which usually indicated the grade levels on their covers, and opened three pages from each book, one from the beginning, one the middle, and one toward the end. We checked the

vocabulary from each page against the vocabulary lists in the textbooks used by the schools under study because interviews with the teachers at an earlier time indicated textbooks as the only source from which students learned new words. Although it varied from page to page, a significant number of words on most of these pages checked did not appear in the vocabulary lists of the textbooks and were therefore considered to be unknown words for the students of our target group. Most of the story or children literature books that we found on the market were appropriate linguistically for students at more advanced levels, such as high school or even college. Younger learners had very few selections of books to read for entertainment or other pragmatic purposes.

Variety of Language Data in the Target Language Input

Books suitable for English extensive reading found in the bookstores covered a rather narrow range of topics: mostly fictions and stories, with very few books on science, history, or other subjects. A proliferation of Chinese books covering a broad spectrum of areas and topics written for elementary and middle school students for entertainment or other pragmatic uses (than test preparation) was found in sharp contrast with the paucity of English books serving the same purposes. As a result, learners would be exposed to a rather restricted range of vocabulary, syntax, or writing styles in English. It would be virtually impossible for them to talk about basic medical knowledge or the outer space in English, for example. A thorough search found only one series reader that contained books on science topics.

Other Features of the Target Language Input

In addition, we found a mismatch of language and content in some cases, meaning that some of the story books were written at a linguistic level incongruent with the age levels that their content and pictures were appropriate for. This applied, for instance, to some of the books in Dashan series. One book from the Level Two of the series contained stories such as “The Ugly Ducking” and “Three Little Pigs”, in which the content and pictures were appropriate for kindergarteners and students at

early primary grades whereas the linguistic level (judged from the vocabulary) would be as high as the junior secondary. Younger learners would find the stories and pictures rather appealing and like to read them but would not be able to do so due to lack of language competence. Linguistically, they were denied access to these books. Older students would have little problems with the language but lost interest in the stories or the pictures, which they would probably consider rather childish or immature. The content and pictures were not age-appropriate for older learners.

Finally, a great majority of the books suitable for extensive reading found in the bookstores were bilingual. In most cases, the English version was followed by Chinese translation page by page. In some cases, the two languages appeared on the same page with English on the top part and Chinese on the bottom. In other cases, the Chinese translation was included in the end of the book, with roughly the first half of the book in English and the second half in Chinese. We found this to be rather problematic. Given the young age of the learners under study, they would not be able to discipline themselves well enough to read the English first. What would be the most likely to happen is that these learners read the Chinese translation upon opening the book and then lose the interest to read the same story again in English.

Summary and Conclusions

Findings of the present study uncover problems existing in English teaching and learning in China which have not been addressed by the recent ELT reform. Younger learners of English, the elementary and junior secondary students, do not receive adequate amount of the target language input in their learning of English. Their limited exposure to English inside school and lack of contact with it outside can be severe constraints on their learning gains. In the school setting, the textbook, sometimes coupled with a student workbook, is typically the only instructional/learning material. Although the textbook has been made thicker, with a larger amount of vocabularies and a wider variety of language functions, it would still be inadequate as the exclusive input source for the students. In out-of-school settings such as home, very few children purchase or read story books or other entertainment

books in English from bookstores. Therefore, they do not receive additional English language input in everyday life, outside the school.

The problem of learning English in input-poor environment is not new in China or other EFL contexts, but has not drawn the level of attention for it to be addressed in the formal educational system. The crucial role that input plays in language learning and the severe impact that poor input can make seem to be little recognized among teachers, school administrators, or ELT reform authorities. The recent series of ELT reform in China, ascribing students' low competence in English to ineffective classroom teaching believed to originate in the traditional teaching methodologies, have been preoccupied with promoting CLT as the solution to the perceived problems (Hu, 2005), while successful language learning actually involves a myriad of factors, among which adequate amount of comprehensible input is essential. As a result, the reform has exerted influences on EFL classroom teaching but made little impact on students' exposure to the target language input. Students are still struggling to learn English in an input-poor environment, which has not been improved as a result of the reform.

Although a large collection of English books could be found on the market, books designed for elementary and junior secondary learners for entertainment reading or other pragmatic uses (than test preparation) were very limited in quantity, and most of them were linguistically too challenging for these students to read. As a result, even if younger learners would like or have developed the habit to read English in their leisure time, they can hardly find resources that enable them to do so.

The only alternative left in a lot of cases for students at younger ages to learn English is therefore to study the same English textbook repetitively within the period of one year: to repetitively read the same vocabulary and sentences and memorize them, which is a common practice that they are engaged in, with the help of their parents sometimes, as part of homework given by the teacher, in order to compensate for the lack of exposure to the target language input from diverse sources through increasing exposure from the same source. The lack of diversification of books and materials not only puts severe constraints on how much language input students are

likely to receive but also undermines their interest in learning English, which probably explains why the teachers we interviewed identified the pervasive existence of low motivation among the students as a big problem in their teaching. For the students, learning English can be described by one word: BORING.

The apparent negligence to the issue of target language input may arise from a line of thinking that input-poor environment is an inherent problem of English language learning undertaken in EFL contexts, given the nature of such contexts, and can therefore hardly be addressed the way teaching methodologies are, the latter of which is relatively easier to be altered or even replaced. As a matter of fact, although the physical settings of EFL cannot be changed, there is a variety of ways to enrich target language input, or in other words, to create an input-rich environment for language learning within those settings. One of the most effective and convenient ways is reading, especially extensive reading, as argued for in previous sections of this article. Children literature, story books, and other books for entertainment or pragmatic purposes, written at appropriate linguistic levels and age levels, addressed to learners' interest, covering a wide variety of topics, and provided in quantity, can turn an input-poor environment in EFL learning contexts into input-rich.

We make suggestions here at two levels. Rather than viewing certain teaching methodologies as the answer to language learning problems, ELT reform endeavors should take a broader perspective on foreign language education that embodies acknowledgement of a myriad of factors involved in English teaching and learning. Among these factors, the issue of target language input should be given prominent attention and addressed in the ELT reform agenda, with an expected outcome of incorporating extensive reading as an essential part of the English curriculum or syllabus. If reform is chiefly carried out through re-designing and issuing textbooks, consider developing and issuing a variety of supplementary textbooks or readers accompanying the existent textbooks on similar or different topics, which can be used by students for additional reading in class or at home.

At the school level, an extensive reading program can be developed and implemented in a variety of ways. For example, the school can establish

connections between their English teachers and publishers or bookstores so that the teachers receive updates of English books suitable for extensive reading. The teachers go through these books on a regular basis and compile a reading list of books appropriate for their students, who will be not only encouraged but also rewarded to read them. Or alternatively, with funding if possible, teachers collaborate with one another, with the help of ELT experts, in writing story books for their students to read.

Additionally, book writers and publishers should consult ELT experts, EFL teachers, and even learners regarding issues such as readability, age-appropriateness, interestingness, range of topics, and so on when designing children literature, story books, and other books for entertainment reading in English. For the books that have been published, feedback from teachers and learners who have read them should be sought out so that they can be improved in later issues.

The present study dealt with an essential aspect of English teaching and learning in EFL contexts, which has unfortunately fallen in cracks in the recent ELT reform in China. It revealed areas of concern that need to be addressed in their future reform endeavors. Driven by the need to keep up with economic globalization, many Asian countries see good mastery of English by their citizens as an important means toward this goal and are stepping up efforts to reform ELT. Findings of this study therefore have wider implications for other Asian contexts in which similar issues surrounding ELT reform may arise.

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Assessing Pragmatic Ability of Thai Hotel Management and Tourism Students in the Context of Hotel Front Office Department

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Abstract

Effective and appropriate communication in the hotel business needs more than linguistic knowledge. Pragmatic competence plays a very crucial role. This study aimed to (1) assess students' pragmatic ability in the context of the hotel Front Office department; (2) study whether the levels of English proficiency have a significant effect on pragmatic ability, and investigate similarities and differences of linguistic forms related to pragmatic ability produced by the students with different levels of English proficiency; and (3) study the errors that interfere with the students' pragmatic knowledge. The subjects were 90 fourth-year Thai university students related to hospitality services. The stratified random technique was applied to obtain the sample size of the students in each language ability group. The research instruments were: a needs assessment questionnaire; the Front Office Pragmatic-Test (FOP-Test); and a pragmatic knowledge questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were employed to assess the students' ability, and observe the effect of the levels of English proficiency on pragmatic ability. Content analysis and frequency counts were conducted to reveal linguistic features and pragmatic failures. The findings revealed that (1) the FOP-Test could distinguish the students' pragmatic ability into high, average, and low levels; (2) there was a significant effect as a result of the levels of

English proficiency on pragmatic ability; and the linguistic features that differentiated the students' pragmatic abilities, in all groups, were the use of politeness markers and address forms; and (3) students produced pragmatic failures, in both pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics. These errors were perceived as ineffectiveness and inappropriateness in hotel staff and guest communication. The findings provided more insights into ESP and EOP teaching and assessment, especially in hospitality services for Thai students.

Background of the study

In the hotel business, English is used as the lingua franca and is the most commonly used language in the hotel industry worldwide (Blue & Harun, 2003; Ruiz-Garrido & Iborra, 2006). Thai hotel staff use English as a major medium to communicate with foreign guests. Besides, English skills are regarded as a prerequisite for economic success (Vandermeeren, 2005). Blue and Harun (2003) emphasize that there is also a growing worldwide need for front-line staff who are able to communicate with guests effectively in the hospitality industry. Diethelm Travel affirms that the Thai tourism industry, including the hotel business, still needs qualified hospitality and tourism workers who have better English skills (Diethelm Travel's Thailand Tourism Review, 2008). This concern corresponds with Wangpaichitr's (2007) point of view in supporting Thai educational institutions to serve front-line staff is a very important factor to increase high quality personnel in the hotel business. Thus, there is a call for education across the country to prepare students for effective and efficient careers in the hospitality industry. According to the record of the Office of Tourism Development (2007), currently 89 institutes, including universities and colleges in Thailand, offer courses and curricula related to hospitality and tourism management. Thus, it is essential that the government and universities should concentrate on English skills in hospitality oriented programs in order to meet the increasing demand of the hospitality industry, and improve overall service quality. To put this into action, the Thai government has established the English Language Development Center (ELDC, 2005) in order to encourage people, in different career paths, to be well equipped with skills, knowledge, and competencies in English, in order to compete with the world

economy. Initially, the English benchmarks for 25 occupations have been proposed, and the standard of English for hotel Front Desk is one of them (ELDC, 2005).

It is known that English communication skills are essential for hotel Front Office staff since they have the highest frequency of interactions with guests and they are centrally concerned with guests' satisfaction. However, Ruiz-Garrido and Iborra (2006), and Vandermeeren (2005), stress that those professional staff in the hospitality industry do not only have grammatical communicative competence, but they also need pragmatic competence. This claim agrees with Blum-Kulka (1982) who concludes that effective communication in any given language requires more than linguistic knowledge. It also includes the ability to appropriately produce and understand utterances in that language. More importantly, Vendermeeren (2005) states that business interaction is often affected by limited sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge. In terms of the corporate world, Vande Berg (1997) points out that communication breakdown; either through linguistics or pragmatics, in any business, could damage customer relations or lose a contact. Thus, effective and appropriate communication in the hotel business does not depend only on grammatical competence, but also on the awareness of pragmatics.

In addition, politeness, a part of pragmatic competence, plays a very crucial role in the guest-hotel staff communication. Blue and Harun (2003) emphasize that hospitality in the hotel business is 'commercial' hospitality. The interaction between guests and hotel employees is a business transaction which aims for costs and benefits. Thus, the relationship between guests and hotel employees cannot be mutual, or friendly, as it occurs in private life. Social distance, power, and the rank of imposition in the aspect of politeness, have to be considered as vital in hotel staff-guest interaction. Accordingly, hotel employees have to employ politeness strategies in their communicative acts or speech acts in order to continue positive relationships with the guests and enhance the likelihood of repeating business. Consequently, the loss of business opportunity can happen if the hotel employees fail to convey the level of politeness appropriately. Since appropriate language use to meet the clients' needs in a certain business can decisively optimize

profits, hotel personnel's English communication skills cannot be overlooked. Apparently, some Thai hotels use their own in-house English tests to examine their employees' communication skills in order to offer special training courses to develop their hotel personnel's English skills; while many consider the scores of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) for an application process, or for placing employees in language classes. However, the TOEIC result is an indirect measure of speaking and writing skills. The scores cannot reveal specific behaviors the candidates can perform in real situations. Moreover, Lui (2006) states that the scores from other large-scale proficiency tests, like TOEFL and International English Language Testing System (IELTS), do not correlate with pragmatic ability. Those who have higher scores do not seem to have correspondingly high pragmatic ability. A number of studies also point out that learners of English as a foreign language, who have excellent grammatical and lexical competence of the target language, still fail to convey their messages or communicate effectively. This is because of the lack of social appropriateness rules, as well as necessary pragmatic or functional communication rules, to communicate their intentions (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Blum-Kulka, 1982; Thomas, 1983; Trosborg, 1987, and Wolfson et al, 1989). Above all, those proficiency tests seem not to reveal the level of an examinee's pragmatic ability, and the appropriateness of language use in the politeness aspect, which are essential in business communication.

To date, the studies examining pragmatic ability for English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), or pragmatic ability at the workplace, are considerably rare. Most available studies in pragmatics are cross-sectional studies, which compare pragmatic competence between English native speakers and nonnative English speakers (Rose, 2000). For foreign language learners, the assessment of pragmatic ability is generally assumed to be investigated under the communicative competence. Liu (2006) and Roever (2006) point out there may be a lack of pragmatic issues in language testing, because constructing valid pragmatic tests is not an easy process. To our knowledge, there are not many studies that assess pragmatic ability in the context of hotel Front Office department. As mentioned above, the need to design a test to assess

Thai students' pragmatic ability in business communication, particularly in the hotel business, is urgent. The English proficiency test alone may not be sufficient to indicate one's pragmatic knowledge. Serious misunderstanding generally occurs at the pragmatic level (Thomas, 1983). In addition, it is necessary to shift, from the test of language functions for all purposes, to focus on the pragmatic knowledge of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) for Thai students in hospitality-oriented programs. Moreover, in order to provide qualified Thai hospitality workers and increase high quality in hotel business, there is a need to concentrate on the pragmatic ability of Thai students who are likely to be hotel employees, to produce pragmatically appropriate utterances in English in their future career.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were as follows: 1) to assess the pragmatic ability of Thai students in hospitality oriented programs by using the Front Office Pragmatic Test based on speech acts and politeness; 2) to study whether the levels of English proficiency have a significant effect on the students' pragmatic ability, and investigate similarities and differences of linguistic forms related to pragmatic ability produced by the students with different levels of English proficiency; and 3) to study the errors that interfere with the students' pragmatic knowledge.

Research Questions

1. Can the Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) differentiate students' pragmatic ability into different levels?
2. Do levels of English proficiency affect students' pragmatic ability; and what are the similarities and differences of the pragmatic ability of the students with different levels of English proficiency?
3. What are the errors that interfere with the students' pragmatic knowledge?

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population of this study were Thai fourth year university students who majored in the field of hospitality from private and public universities in Bangkok. These students had all completed the prerequisite courses of English at their universities, and were required to participate in an internship program with hospitality or tourism companies in Thailand before graduating. The participants of the study were selected from three universities in Bangkok which are long established in providing potential students to enter the hospitality or tourism industry. The students were classified into three groups of high, average, and low language ability, according to their GPA in English courses taken through the curriculum. The stratified random sampling technique was applied to obtain the sample size of 30 students in each language ability group. Thus, the sample of this study included 90 students.

Research Instruments

Research instruments in the study included: the needs assessment questionnaire; the Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test); and a pragmatic knowledge questionnaire. The development of each instrument is briefly explained as follows:

1. The needs assessment questionnaire was conducted to draw situations likely to happen in the hotel Front Office department; and investigate the problematic five speech acts, reflected by the hotel Front Office staff from six leading hotels in Bangkok. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: (a) demographic information; (b) closed and open items obtained from the surveyed situations that were likely to happen in the Front Office department concerning eight speech acts of informing, apologizing, handling complaints, offering, promising, requesting, thanking, and responding to compliments; and (c) hotel staff's opinions towards the degree of difficulty of speech acts surveyed. As a result, the top five speech acts which were considered problematic for Thai hotel Front Office staff were: apologizing, handling complaints, requesting, informing, and promising respectively. The situations to be tested were drawn from the data collected from the questionnaire, and hotel staff's opinions. The selection of three situations to be tested for each speech act was based on the Item Objective Congruence (IOC), from the occupational experts and

practitioners, related to the hotel Front Office services. The situations with the degree of congruence of more than 70% were randomly selected to be included in the test situations. Thus, the situations of five speech acts that were finally selected to be included in the FOP-Test are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The given situations in the FOP-Test

Speech acts	Situations
Apologizing	Apologize for ineffective service claimed by the staying guest Apologize for unavailability of the room asked for upon checking-in Apologize to the arrival guest for a shortage of staff when checking-in
Handling Complaints	Deal with the malfunction of a water heater Deal with noise disturbance from the next door, and the housekeeper's duty on the floor Deal with the no-show of the airport representative as requested in the reservation
Requesting	Request a walk-in guest for a deposit Request the check-in guest to give the check-out time, due to high occupancy rate Request the check-out guest to pay for two hotel bathrobes taken from the room
Informing	Inform where to get access to the internet Inform the check-out guest regarding an invalid credit card Inform the late check-out charge
Promising	Promise to send more room amenities Promise to arrange the limousine to the airport Promise to mail the hotel guest's lost item if found

2. The Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) focused on problematic speech acts reflected by the practitioners, and from the politeness dimension in the context of hotel Front Office department. The constructs of the FOP-Test were based on the theoretical framework of Austin's speech acts (1962), and Brown and Levinson's politeness (1987), as well as studies concerning assessment of pragmatic ability in different learning contexts. The test method of the FOP-Test was typically an oral discourse completion test; however, it was designed by the computer software called Adobe Captivate. The program can facilitate the test face with audio-visual simulation. There were 15 situations of 5 speech acts assessed in the FOP-Test. A slide of each situation is presented into 3 sections: the prompt scenario; the speech of a simulated hotel guest; and the slot provided for the test taker's speech to respond to the simulated hotel guest. The test takers gave responses to the

prompted scenario, by saying aloud what they would respond to the simulated hotel guests, relating to the given situations. The test takers' speeches were recorded, transcribed and finally rated. (See the Appendix for a sample of the FOP-Test).

3. The pragmatic knowledge questionnaire was expected to provide information about the test takers' background knowledge in pragmatics in general, speech acts, and politeness in language used. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was a true or false questionnaire which included 15 statements concerning background knowledge of pragmatics in general. The statements were knowledge of pragmatics relating to the context of a hotel Front Office department. The second part was composed of five scenarios, representing five speech acts assessed in the test. There were five responses to each scenario. A five point Likert scale was given to the test takers, to rate the appropriateness of each response statement under the situations. The rating ranged from "very inappropriate" as "1", to "very appropriate" as "5", on the scale. The rating scale could be made just once.

Data Collection

The test was administered to the students in three universities under supervised conditions in the university's computer laboratories. The administration of the FOP-Test took about one hour including the practice session (to check the test takers' understanding of the steps in doing the test). The test takers' responses were recorded and saved into the Sound Recorder program. After the FOP-Test was completed, the questionnaires of pragmatic knowledge were distributed. For the collected speeches, the sound files were transcribed and scored by two trained raters. The FOP-Test scoring scale was adapted from the holistic scale of Hudson et al (1995). It was developed into an analytical rating scale of four descriptors with five level bands assessing the effectiveness of language use. The four major descriptors are: the correct speech act; expressions and vocabulary; amount of information given; and degree of appropriateness (levels of formality, directness, and politeness). To investigate the reliability of the scores from the two raters, the inter-rater reliability was estimated by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. It was found that the

consistency between the two raters, for the total scores and each variable, was significantly correlated at the 0.01 level ($r = .857$ to $.953$). This means the reliability among the scores of the two raters was significant and highly correlated.

Data Analysis

The data was collected and analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Descriptive statistics were carried out to examine the pragmatic ability assessed by the FOP-Test. One-way ANOVA was conducted to test if the means of each of the three language ability groups of the test takers were significantly different. After that, a Scheff's post-hoc test multiple comparison test was carried out; to locate the significant differences among the means of the three groups. Content analysis was employed to examine the similarities and the differences of typical linguistic features found from the test takers' responses. The result was analyzed by comparing the frequency of the pragmalinguistic features that were correspondingly related to the FOP-Test rating scale. In addition, content analysis was used to examine the major features of inappropriateness of responses, which could lead to pragmatic failures in the context of a hotel Front Office department. Finally, the answers from the pragmatic knowledge questionnaire were analyzed to obtain the mean scores.

Results

The findings from this study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. Can the Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) differentiate students' pragmatic ability into different levels?

It was found that the total mean score, and the mean score of each component (the correct speech act, the expressions and vocabulary, the amount of information, and the degree of appropriateness) of the FOP-Test differed significantly among the three groups. The mean score obtained from the test takers with the high language ability was more than those of the average and low groups, in the total score, and in all four components. This finding revealed that the FOP-Test could distinguish the test takers

into three pragmatic ability groups using both the total and component scores.

2. Do levels of English proficiency affect students' pragmatic ability and what are the similarities and differences of the pragmatic ability of students with different levels of English proficiency?

Regarding the first part of the second research question, the findings were found to support the hypothesis: that there were significant differences in pragmatic ability of the students with high, average, and low language ability in all components assessed (i.e. the correct speech acts, the expressions and vocabulary, the amount of information, and degree of appropriateness) at the .001 level. The F values were, 21.630, 24.669, 23.717, and 26.328. More specifically, when employing a Scheff's post-hoc test, to examine the differences among the means of the three different levels of English proficiency, it was found that all the p values were highly significant. Thus, the students' pragmatic ability, from the high, average, and low levels of English proficiency, differed significantly.

According to the second part of the second research question, the responses of 10 test takers from each language ability group were randomly selected: so the data collected from 30 respondents was examined. The major linguistic features performed from the test takers could be grouped into seven categories: routine patterns; formulaic expressions of regret; politeness markers; adverbials; affirmation markers; address forms; and the use of the "we" form. These features were categorized based on the actual responses to the five speech acts assessed by the FOP-Test. The frequency of occurrences of linguistic features are shown in Figure 1.

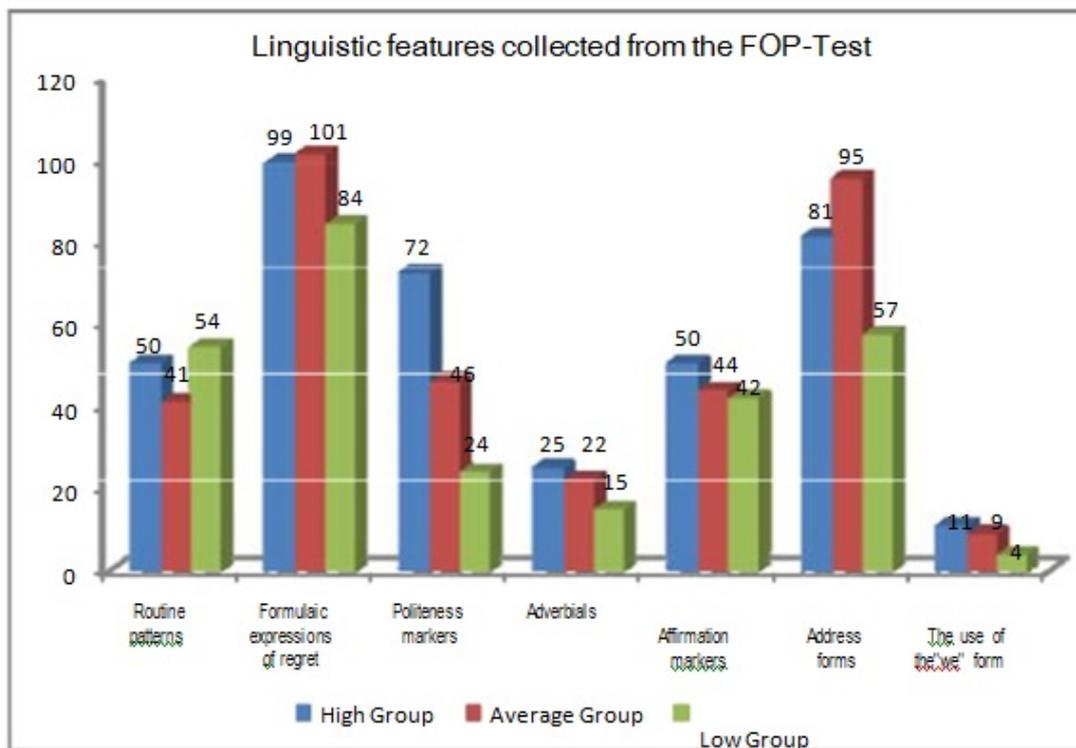


Figure 1: The differentiation of linguistic features collected from the five speech acts, assessed by the FOP-Test

Figure 1 revealed that the use of politeness markers and the use of address forms were two distinctive features which appeared to differentiate the students’ pragmatic productions of all proficiency levels. The former was highly performed by the high proficient students only, while the latter was more frequently used by both high and average proficient students. The other five linguistic features: routine patterns, formulaic expressions of regret, adverbials, affirmation markers, and the use of the “we” form were performed similarly in all groups with just a small difference. Comparing the frequency among the similar features, the students in all proficiency levels highly exhibited the use of formulaic expressions of regret. The use of routine patterns and affirmation markers were moderately produced while the use of adverbials was less than the others. The use of the “we” form, which was not in the routine patterns and formulaic expressions of regret, was used the least. Apart from the major linguistic features, minor linguistic ones were also analyzed. It was found that the high proficient students preferred to use the pre-closing marker “(xxx) thank

you (xxx)” differently from the average and the low groups. On the contrary, the low proficient students tended to use “(xxx) okay (xxx)” to terminate the conversation more often than the other two groups. Little evidence of the use of pre-closing patterns like “*It’s all right (okay)/Is that okay with you? /Are you okay?*” was found. They were used by the high and low proficient students, but not in the average ones.

Another minor feature that remarkably distinguished the students’ pragmatic production in all proficiency levels was the use of direct refusals in the low proficient students. The expression letting the interlocutor off the hook “Don’t worry (about that)” was more frequently used by the low proficient students. Moreover, the strategies applied in handling complaints and apologizing were also observed, together with the observation of linguistic forms produced by the students. When comparing the frequency counts, it was found that the students in all proficiency levels similarly applied strategies needed when handling complaints and apologizing. However, the strategy of offering a repair was remarkably highest performed when compared with the strategies of giving an explanation, acknowledging the responsibility, giving compensation, and promising of forbearance. These strategies were produced to a very low degree, and with a small difference, in all groups.

3. What are the errors that interfere with the students’ pragmatic knowledge?

The findings revealed that test takers from three English proficiency levels did not differ significantly in pragmatic recognition assessed by the questionnaire. It showed that the recognition of pragmatic reflection from the questionnaire was not related to the production of pragmatic ability assessed by the FOP-Test. Due to the differences in the means reported from the questionnaire, pragmatic failures produced by the test takers in all groups were analyzed qualitatively: in order to investigate the interference or pragmatic failures that could lead to misunderstanding, or communication breakdowns, between hotel staff and guests. The data was drawn from the same group of the test takers who were randomly selected to answer the second research question, and the scripts were

analyzed qualitatively before the frequency counts were made. From the analysis of inappropriateness of language use in the context of a hotel Front Office department, the errors were grouped into seven failures, based on the descriptors of ineffectiveness along with the inappropriateness of the FOP-Test rating scale. The report for each error was analyzed based on the frequency of occurrences as shown in Figure 2.

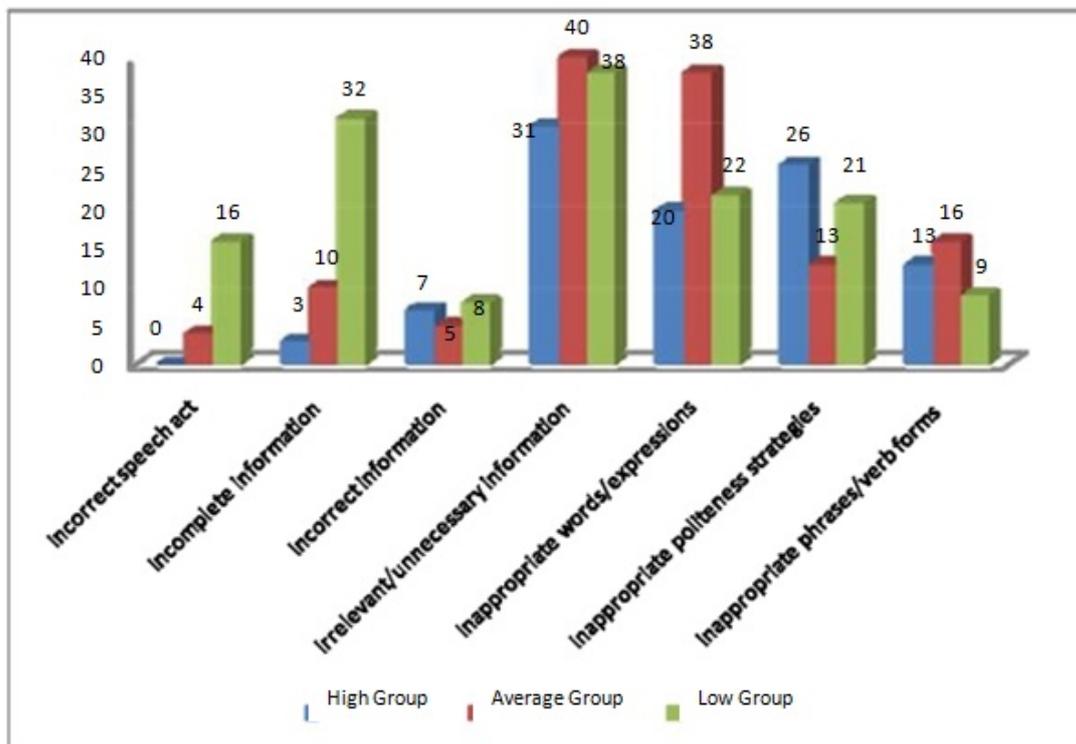


Figure2: Pragmatic errors produced by Thai students in the hotel Front Office context

From Figure 2, the first observation was the deficiency in giving the correct speech act. The second to the fourth observations report the failures in information given. The fifth observation was the deficiency in the usage of words and expressions. The last two observations were the failures in terms of degrees of appropriateness. The report for each error was analyzed with regard of the frequency of occurrences. From the errors made in the context of a hotel Front Office department, the failures in giving correct speech acts, complete information, correct information, necessary information, and formulaic expressions were perceived as pragmalinguistic failures,

due to the lack of linguistic and contextual knowledge. The failures in using appropriateness in politeness strategies, and the use of phrases or verb forms, were considered as sociopragmatic failures. These two failures were also perceived as being impolite, leading to the end of hotel staff-guest relations.

Discussions

The following section presents discussions based on the three research questions.

Research question 1: *With regard to the first research question, “Can the Front Office Pragmatic Test (FOP-Test) differentiate students’ pragmatic ability into different*

levels? It was found that the FOP-Test can differentiate the test takers’ pragmatic ability into three levels: high, average, and low; and the mean score obtained from the test takers with the high language ability is more than those of the average and low groups in all four components. Thus, it can be said that the high proficient students could apply their grammatical knowledge and politeness strategies to their speech production, under time pressure in the test; while the low proficient students had difficulty in constructing their utterances to fit the given situations; due to the lack of linguistic knowledge. One possible reason for this difference is that the test takers in this study were divided into three proficiency groups according to their GPA in English; therefore, the resemblance of the three groups of English proficiency affects the pragmatic ability. So, it could be concluded that the oral elicitation method, by means of the computer mode, the FOP-Test, could elicit the students’ pragmatic ability in the hotel Front Office context.

When using the scores obtained from each component, the students’ pragmatic ability can be differentiated. This agrees with Hudson (2001) who reconfirmed that five pragmalinguistic components of: correctness of linguistic expressions; the amount of information; formality; directness; and politeness can be used to evaluate the speakers’ actual responses. Considering the scores in each speech act, it was also found that the mean score of the correct speech act was the highest, while the mean

score of the amount of information was the lowest. This can be interpreted as follows: the ability to give the correct speech act is regarded as the easiest, while giving sufficient amount of information is the most difficult. This indicates that the test takers from the different language ability groups could recognize what speech act was called for. On the contrary, the scores of giving the sufficient amount of information were rated the lowest. This can be explained as follows: giving utterances in length required syntactical, or grammatical knowledge to a certain extent, or elaborating the utterances could lead to hotel-guest satisfaction.

Research question 2: *Do levels of English proficiency affect students' pragmatic ability and what are the similarities and differences of the pragmatic ability of students with different levels of English proficiency?* For the first part of the second research question, it was found that English proficiency is a variable which has a great effect on the test takers' pragmatic ability. This agrees with Taguchi (2007) who supports that language background and English proficiency have influenced L2 pragmatic processing. The findings of this study also confirm the studies of Bardovi-Harling and Dornyei (1998) in that EFL/ESL learning content, and proficiency levels, affect the ability in pragmatic and grammatical awareness. Besides, the findings of this study correspond with some previous studies (Matsumura, 2003; Roever, 2005) in that the high language proficient participants had better performance in pragmatics tests than low language proficient participants. This is similar to the findings of Matsumura (2003) who reveals that the overall level of proficiency in the target language plays an important role in the acquisition of pragmatic awareness.

The second research question also examined the similarities and differences of the responses collected from the test takers from the three language ability groups. The most significant differences among the students from the different levels of English proficiency were the use of politeness markers and the use of address forms. The highly proficient students exhibited more politeness markers than the other two groups. Some markers such as *"Would you mind...?"*, *"Can you possibly...?"*, and the hedge markers like *"I'm afraid that ..."* and *"I think..."* required the syntactic structures to lengthen the utterances and complete the sentences. The highly proficient students

employed more linguistic knowledge to realize politeness patterns. The less proficient students tended to use markers like a single word “*Please*” or “*Please + VP*” when they felt they needed to be polite. There are two possible reasons for the apparent high frequency in the use of politeness markers produced by high level test takers. First, the high level English proficiency test takers may have awareness, and be more comfortable to make their speech more polite than the average and the low groups. Secondly, the English proficiency of high level test takers enables them to make their responses more polite: by applying their grammatical knowledge to lengthen their intentions in English; while the low level test takers might have difficulty due to the lack of grammatical knowledge to express themselves. It can be seen that the test takers from the high group commonly applied politeness markers in their responses to the stimulated hotel guests in the situations given in the FOP-Test. Thus, proficiency is seen to play a role in the frequency of the use of politeness markers in this study.

Moreover, another difference among the three groups appears in the use of address forms to the hotel guests. The test takers called the guests by addressing them with a title like “Sir, would you ...?” which is considered polite and appropriate in the context of hotel service encounters. The test takers from the high and the average levels of test takers performed the use of “Sir” or “Madam” to a high degree relatively; while the low language ability group used it the least. This indicates that the high level and average level groups have power-hierarchy consciousness towards being formal in hotel staff-guest transactions in English.

Regarding similar linguistic features, performed in all proficiency levels, the number of frequency differed, but the degree of differences was rather small. The high frequency of the following strategies ranged from the use of formulaic expressions of regret, routine patterns, affirmation markers, adverbials, and the use of the “we” form respectively. The features of occurrences depended on the types of speech acts, and the given situations in the test. Owing to the retrospective semi-structured interview made in the pilot study, the students revealed that they had no opportunity to be exposed to English in actual hotel practices. They only learned and

practiced from teacher instructions, textbooks, and the typical simulated activities of role playing in hotel settings. Thus, classroom instruction is key in affecting the students' choice of a particular word, expression, or even realization of the structure, in a certain function activity in hotel circumstances. Besides, it is very typical to see the test takers tended to use one form of routine pattern repeatedly in their responses in a certain speech act. A possible explanation for the apparently high frequency of routine patterns in the low group is that those forms can be learned easily through the list of possible utterances provided in their textbooks; so they possibly rely on the rote memorization of formulaic phrases. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the high occurrences of formulaic expressions of regret, including the use of routine patterns, might not necessarily represent the students' pragmatic comprehension. Scarcella (1979) concludes that L2 learners seem to use politeness features before they acquire the rules that they need to govern their speech in real-life communication. Regarding the strategies applied in handling complaints and apologizing, all groups of English proficiency applied each strategy to a greater or lesser extent, but could not distinguish the differences: except for the strategy "offer a repair." The high occurrences of "offer a repair" found in this study were obviously influenced by classroom practice and available textbooks related to English for hotels. However, the evidence of low occurrences of other strategies, in handling complaints and apologizing, does not suggest that students could not perform those strategies in real-life communication: due to the lack of negotiation of the test method.

Research question 3: *What are the errors that interfere with the students' pragmatic knowledge?* The findings from the pragmatic knowledge questionnaire indicate that the test takers in the three groups did not differ significantly in pragmatic recognition, as assessed by the questionnaire. The major features of inappropriateness in language used, collected from the test takers' responses, were grouped into seven types of inappropriateness. The degree of seriousness in hotel-staff and guest communication depends on whether it is pramalinguistics or sociopragmatics. The error arising from the first one can be more easily forgiven

because it is perceived as a linguistic problem; while the latter one is most serious because it relates to the inappropriateness of the linguist behavior. The failures were grouped into seven features: based on the descriptors of ineffectiveness along with the inappropriateness of the FOP-Test rating scale. Ineffectiveness of giving correct speech acts; irrelevant or unnecessary information; and inappropriateness in the use of formulaic expressions appear to be less serious because they do not really harm host-guest interactions. The first two failures apparently reflect their lack of grammar, vocabulary, and include inexperience in real job performance. These incompetencies appear to impede the students from giving the correct speech act, and informative responses, relating to a particular given situation. Blum-Kulka (1982: 53)

states that “failure to mark speech act can be another source of pragmatic inappropriacy.” With regard to inappropriateness in the use of formulaic expressions; it may be a result of learning from previous classroom instructions, particularly from textbooks. In addition, most of the language from textbooks relating to hotel services are too explicit, overly polite, and often simplified (Williams, 1988; Blue & Harun, 2003). This agrees with Scotton and Bernstein (1988: 53) who state that textbooks provide “lists of over-polite, over explicit, one-sentence long exponents for function”. Boxer and Pickering (1995) reveal that the patterns presented in many ESL/EFL textbooks generally rely on the authors’ intuitions; and those patterns greatly differ from the actual speech behavior in spontaneous interactions. Those predictable patterns could not help the students to communicate in real life communication. As a result, the errors in giving the correct speech act, precise information, and appropriate formulaic expressions might not really damage the hotel staff-guest communications; but they could highly affect the guest’s perception towards an individual as an unprofessional or incompetent practitioner.

Besides, the failure to give complete and correct information may potentially cause misunderstanding. The students were expected to give the information relating to the given situations only, not from other sources; however, they still gave incomplete and incorrect answers. From the scores obtained from the FOP-Test, it is

interesting to see the scores for giving a sufficient amount of information was rated the lowest; and the less proficient students tended to perform these errors. It can be said that their lack of syntactical or grammatical knowledge might prevent them from elaborating or lengthening their utterances in English fluently. Besides, the lack of familiarity or ease with the given situations in the test may affect their test performance. Blue and Harun (2003) mention that the characteristics of hotel encounters are informative and purposeful; thus, giving insufficient or incorrect information may not end the transactions, but it might create undesirable effects if the complicated problems, in difficult situations, have been unsolved; particularly in complaining.

Regarding the inappropriateness in politeness strategies, and the use of phrases or verb forms; these two errors are perceived to lead to the most serious misunderstandings, and could end the customer relations. One possible explanation for this failure is the lack of pragmatic awareness. From the utterances collected, there are fewer expressions of indirectness. Generally the examinees exhibited their grammatical knowledge and were able to use syntactic patterns in their utterances, especially in the high language ability group. However, they lacked knowledge in applying politeness strategies to save the hearer's face, the hotel guest; which is indeed important in the hotel context. Since the communication of the hotel staff-guest involves a cost-benefit relationship, the knowledge about what is appropriate depends on much more just linguistic knowledge. This problem was raised by Trosborg (1987: 147) who states that "proficient foreign language learners may fail to communicate effectively because they lack social appropriateness rules for conveying their intended communicative acts." Besides, the imperative verb forms such as "must" and "have to" were highly used, especially in making requests. This is opposite to Levinson (1983) in that the imperative is rarely used in requests in English. Native English speakers tend to make sentences indirect when a request is made. This failure is perceived as being rude in the hotel industry. There are two possible explanations for this occurrence. First, according to Blum-Kulka (1982), imperatives are the first request forms taught in L2. The learners acquire the use of imperatives easily because they are direct and a clear strategy in requesting. As a result, the learners might use them

without being aware of taking a risk of high imposition to the guests, who generally have high needs/wants in services. Secondly, it is clear that the examinees had no tact maxim; one aspect of politeness, which plays an important role in a scale of cost-benefit to the hearer (hotel guest) (Leech, 1983). This scale of politeness is the preference in the hotel service context where “benefits to guests” is required, but “cost to the guests” is to be avoided. Indirectness tends to be more polite because it increases the degree of options and decreases the force to the hearer (Leech, 1983). Leech (1983) views that tact is used to avoid conflict which apparently comes with experience in social communication. The lack of real work-oriented communication in hotel services can be one of the factors that makes the test takers unaware that the lack of tact brings a high cost to the hotel guests.

Conclusion

This study attempted to elicit and assess the pragmatic production of Thai students majoring in hospitality services, from different levels of English proficiency. The findings indicated that the FOP-Test could distinguish the students into high, average, and low pragmatic ability groups; and there was a significant main effect of the students’ levels of English proficiency on their pragmatic ability. As regards the students’ production in pragmaticlinguistic forms; the most significant differences, among the students from different levels of English proficiency, were the use of politeness markers and the use of address forms. The findings also revealed that the test takers in all groups produced pragmatic failures in both pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics. These errors were perceived as ineffectiveness and inappropriateness in hotel staff and guest communication. From the study, it can be seen that the FOP-Test allowed the students to perform to the best of their pragmatic ability, and the students’ pragmatic behaviors could be observed from their various responses. For further research, it would be beneficial to specify types of speech acts which differ from one another; and to examine different politeness strategies, in different types of service encounters, because the success of many important businesses depends upon mastering the maxim of politeness. This study may

contribute to test developers and researchers in the testing field; to develop other methods which require more authentic oral productions, that would give more insightful data of both pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic features. Thus, the FOP-Test has the potential to be further developed and applied, to investigate students' pragmatic ability in ESP/EOP, in different contexts.

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Appendix: Sample of the FOP-Test

