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Foreword

Welcome to the June edition of the *Asian EFL Journal*. Again we present a broad variety of papers both in topic and geographical origin. In this issue we also introduce two book reviews into the quarterly issue for the first time. We hope to make this a regular feature from now on and welcome our first contributions from Dr. Wendy Y.K. Lam of The Hong Kong Institute of Education and Nashwa Ezzat Badr and Mai Amin Hassan of Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As a young but expanding journal, our aim is to become a leading voice in the international arena and we are increasingly looking for papers that may be very relevant locally, but also have applications and insights well beyond the contexts in which they were written. Many of the June authors have been through our new and more demanding review system, which we are still making efforts to improve. We thank our authors for their patience and persistence and the expanding editorial team of volunteers who work behind the scenes. In this issue we have a balance between experienced and well-published authors and authors who are publishing for the first time in an international journal.

In the first paper, *Cross-cultural Communication: Saudi, Ukrainian, and Russian Students Online,* Reima al-Jarf provides us with the kind of international input that we welcome, describing an innovative cross-cultural writing project involving three EFL college instructors in Ukraine, Russia and Saudi Arabia and their undergraduate students who crossed borders virtually in order to break down communication barriers. Naturally, Asian EFL authors and editors have become used to making friends and having meaningful professional relationships online, yet those of us who have physically crossed cultures frequently may still wonder about the claim that "second language (L2) students no longer need to leave their homes or travel to meet people from other countries and learn about their culture". Al-Jarf's pioneering effort aims at more than just language improvement and, importantly, students felt they developed "a global perspective as well as language and communication skills".

EFL topics are infinitely varied. After Al-Jarf's humanistic global concerns that are always of interest to language teachers, Hu Ying-hui in an article entitled *An Investigation into the Task Features Affecting EFL Listening Comprehension Test Performance,* grapples with the highly specialized complexities of testing listening, focusing on the role of text variables in predicting item difficulty. Ying-hui's findings indicate that "text-by-item interaction variables contribute significantly to item difficulty, thereby providing evidence favoring the construct validity of CET listening tests."

An important feature of Jason Miin-Hwa Lim's study from Malaysia, *Associating Interference with Strategy Instruction: An Investigation into the Learning of the Present Continuous*, is the ability of the author to relate theory to classroom practice and to provide interesting pedagogical suggestions that seem relevant beyond the research context. Lim discusses the relationship between interlingual and intralingual interference in relation to the teaching of the present continuous tense concluding that "interference that caused a large portion of the errors may be both intralingual and interlingual in nature".

In our applied linguistics field, it is often difficult to come up with the kind of "scientific" quantifiable evidence that provide absolute confidence in research results. However, Lilian Chen's study, *The Effect of the Use of L1 in a Multimedia Tutorial on Grammar Learning: An Error Analysis of Taiwanese Beginning EFL Learners' English Essays*, shows that finding no statistical evidence for the impact of an approach is not an insignificant result. In her study aimed at discovering whether an L1 computer assisted instruction tutorial program had an impact on the grammar skills of beginning EFL language learners, Chen reports that "no significant statistical difference between the control group and the experimental group could be identified". The discussion goes on to assess qualitative evidence and concludes that L1 still plays a role in the process of beginning EFL learners' writing in English. This paper is published here as a useful contribution to an important area of research that clearly requires further investigation.

In our fifth paper, *On the Teaching and Learning of L2 Sociolinguistic Competence in Classroom Settings*, Ming-chung Yu reports "an investigation of classroom practice and its effects on the learner's development of sociolinguistic competence" in Taiwan. She concludes that little is done to develop pragmatic ability and identifies the need for more flexibility "toward and tolerance of cross-cultural variations" pointing out that even when teachers or students decide not to conform to other cultural norms, "they will at least be able to identify the sources of possible misunderstandings". Such conclusions from the field are interesting in an age where we clearly need to keep questioning the meaning of "competence" when English is used in international communication.

Another important issue is raised in relation to intercultural competence by Derrick Nault in *Using World Literatures to Promote Intercultural Competence in Asian EFL Learners*. While traditional university "language" majors tended to study little but literature, we are now experiencing a situation in many contexts in which literature is hardly taught at all. This seems difficult to justify when one aim of many language–based courses is the study and understanding of culture. Nault points out that "at a time when communicative skills are a major concern in EFL programs, literature may seem to be a frivolous addition to language classes. By putting texts at the center of lessons, the English instructor using literature might be accused of neglecting speaking, listening and practical reading skills." Nault outlines a convincing intercultural approach pointing out that this "can improve … general English reading and discussion skills as well as enhance … intercultural competence." Two invaluable outcomes of using literary texts identified by Nault are both emotional and intellectual enrichment, establishing important humanistic educational goals.

Farood Sepassi examines another topic of relevance across cultures in *Age-related Variations in EFL Learners' Attentiveness to Prosodic vs. Syntactic Cues of Sentence Structure*. Sepassi investigates the relationship between the age of Iranian EFL learners and strategy use in the interpretation of sentences. Sepassi concludes that "comparison of the different age groups' performance on the task revealed that younger learners were more inclined to follow prosodic cues and older learners were more inclined to follow syntactic ones." Sepassi suggests that one conclusion might be a need to focus courses more on phonology for older learners.

Nehir Sert's article, EFL Student Teachers' Learning Autonomy, investigates English language learning autonomy among EFL student teachers in Turkey. Her study finds that "they lack the capacity for self-assessment in monitoring their own language learning process". She concludes "that increased awareness of autonomous learning and its benefits will enhance their own self-governing capacity which may, in turn, contribute to higher achievement and motivation." Naturally better self-awareness of autonomous learning by teachers themselves is a prerequisite to teaching any form of learner independence to students. This would be an interesting study to replicate in other contexts.

Eva Bernat also focuses on the learners' perspective in *Assessing EAP Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning in the Australian Context*. She reports on beliefs held by EAP language learners at an Australian university and compares the findings with an American study of EAP learners. The results show that beliefs about language learning were similar, leading to an interesting discussion about the extent to which beliefs about EAP language learning vary according to contextual setting.

Asako Uchibori, Kiyomi Chujo and Shuji Hasegawa, in *Towards Better Grammar Instruction: Bridging the Gap Between High School Textbooks and TOEIC* address the problem of the gap between high school English education and the requirements of higher education - a theme that is relevant beyond Japan, however unique the Japanese situation may appear. They discuss grammatical features and structures needed to both enhance students' classroom learning and their ability to cope with tests like the TOEIC, which claim to measure proficiency in international English communication. Naturally this depends on the assumption that such tests do actually measure international communication proficiency. Again this is clearly an important area for further thinking and research.

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Cross-cultural Communication: Saudi, Ukrainian, and Russian Students Online

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Bio Data

Reima Al-Jarf teaches EFL, ESP, linguistics, and translation at KSU, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She has 4 books and 60 articles published in refereed international and national journals. She has given 85 conference presentations worldwide, is a member of 22 professional organizations and has served on international and national committees.

Abstract

This paper describes a cross-cultural online writing project in which three English-as-a foreign language (EFL) college instructors in Ukraine, Russia and Saudi Arabia and their undergraduate students participated. The aim of the project was to develop students' writing skills in EFL, to develop their awareness of local and global cultural issues and events, and to develop their ability to communicate and interact with students from other cultures. Thirteen discussion threads, twenty external links, nine documents, three assignments, a photo gallery and PowerPoint presentations were posted in the Nicenet course-site. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the students' messages and reactions are reported.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, EFL, writing, exchange, online instruction, global issues, culture.

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1. Introduction

Interest in cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural awareness, and cross-cultural understanding among politicians, economists, businessmen, educators and other partners is increasing. Second language (L2) students no longer need to leave their homes or

travel to meet people from other countries and learn about their culture. Some foreign language educators in countries like Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Germany, and South America are making use of information and communication technologies to connect L2 students with students of the target language in the USA, UK or Canada. A review of the L2 literature has shown that web-based video, e-mail, audio and video conferencing, web-page design, internet-based resources, culture portfolios, online newspapers and online chat rooms were integrated in the teaching of target culture to junior and senior high school and college students learning English, French, German and Spanish as a second or foreign language.

E-mail exchanges between four American and Canadian college preparatory ESL students were found to be effective in teaching intercultural awareness, in creating a positive affective climate, and in making the English-for-Academic-Purposes (EAP) curriculum more relevant to the students (Ruhe, 1998). In another study by Schoorman and Camarillo (2000), 56 pairs of university-school partners participated in an e-mail-based project. Pre-service teachers and middle school students corresponded with each other for ten weeks. Analysis of the letters written during the ten-week period, end-of-semester pre-service teacher project reports, weekly instructor field notes, faculty/pre-service student dialogue journals, and a questionnaire completed by middle school students at the end of the project revealed positive outcomes including a broadening of multicultural awareness and improvement in L2 skills. In a similar project conducted by Cifuentes and Shih (2001), forty pairs of American pre-service teachers and Taiwanese university students corresponded by e-mail. Findings of pre- and post-connection surveys, midterm surveys, reflective journals, final reports, and interview transcripts indicated that Taiwanese participants were positive about online ESL acquisition and cultural learning before and after the connection. They preferred the one-on-one e-mail exchange to the web-based environment.

Many other studies combined e-mail with other forms of technology. For instance, Singhal (1998) reviewed several studies and projects on computer-mediated communication used for enhancing L2 learning and culture education, and examined their

impact on elementary, secondary, and college students. She found that e-mail and teleconferencing provided authentic communication and fostered awareness of languages and cultures. In addition to the studies reviewed by Singhal, 45 French and American middle school students corresponded via electronic mail on a daily basis and participated in several teleconferences (Shelley, 1996). In the second year of the project, both groups produced a bilingual play, describing various sociolinguistic and cultural elements of the respective cultures. Shelley found that target language usage and interest increased over the duration of the project. Electronic exchange between French and American students was found to be an effective activity that enhanced the language learning skills of all students involved in the project.

Moreover, e-mail, web page design, and a two-way group teleconferencing (audio & video) were effectively used to learn about cultural differences in childhood socialization in an intercultural communication project that allowed French and American foreign-language students to learn the language as a part of culture while taking advantage of telecommunication technology ((Kinginger, Gourves-Hayward and Simson, 1999). In this study, students in a U.S. undergraduate French class and in a French post-graduate engineering course pursued an intercultural stance via electronic interactions concerning cultural differences, focusing on childhood socialization. In addition, the participants used a textbook, readings, films and children's literature to learn about childhood socialization.

Furthermore, two studies by Lee (1997) and Osuna and Meskill (1998) reported that use of Internet resources was a meaningful way to integrate language and culture and provide opportunities for students to learn about the target culture while using e-mail to discuss cultural issues with native speakers. Internet resources were used as a means of gaining a deeper sense of Spanish culture by college students. Findings of those two studies demonstrated that the web was a suitable tool for increasing linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as a means of increasing motivation.

Other technologies that proved to be successful in helping college students bring insider's views of other cultures into the foreign language classroom were Internet-based culture portfolios (Abrams, 2002). Abrams divided 68 intermediate students learning German at a Midwestern university into traditional and experimental groups. Students in the experimental group carried out online interviews with native informants in order to explore the stereotypical views of the cultures of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Responses to a post-project questionnaire indicated that most of the students in the experimental group were better able to view culture with an insider's perspective, reflected a developing sensitivity to diversity within the cultures of German-speaking countries, and showed an awareness of the idea that political boundaries are inadequate for determining cultural boundaries.

In another study, online newspapers and online chat rooms were used with college-level advanced Spanish students to develop students' cultural knowledge and language skills (Lee, 1998). Pre- and post-program surveys indicated that the program enhanced students' cultural knowledge, reading and oral skills.

However, a constructivist computer-assisted language learning (CALL) environment, consisting of web-based activities and a U.S. e-pal activity used in teaching English writing to 29 freshman Taiwanese students did not help enhance students' attitudes towards American culture (Chen, 2001). Results of the surveys, quantitative observations, and phenomenological interviews indicated that Taiwanese students' attitudes towards learning the target culture, as well as their learning styles, did not undergo any significant change.

From the above studies, it can be concluded that the integration of different forms of technology such as e-mail only, e-mail and teleconferencing, audio and video conferencing, web-page design, internet-based resources and culture portfolios, online newspapers and online chat rooms in the teaching of target culture to middle, high school and college students learning English, French, German and Spanish as a second or foreign language resulted in significant gains in student cultural knowledge and positive

attitudes towards the target culture. E-mail was the most common technology used even when combined with teleconferences or internet culture portfolios. On the contrary, e-pal activities did not prove to be as effective.

The integration of online courses in the teaching of the target culture and their effect on English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) students' cultural awareness was not investigated. Most of the studies reported above focused on inter-cultural collaboration between L2 students and L1 students or pre-service teachers. Online collaboration between EFL students from different countries was not the subject of any research. Therefore, the present study aimed to use an online course in which three EFL college instructors from Ukraine, Russia and Saudi Arabia and their EFL undergraduate students participated. The aim of the course was to develop the students' writing skills, ability to communicate with students from other cultures and awareness of global and cultural issues. The present study describes how the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi instructors and students were connected, how they interacted and shared knowledge and experiences. It also describes the online course objectives, components and content, discussion topics, and instructors' role. In addition, the study tried to answer the following questions: (1) What are the characteristics of the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi students' posts in terms of message frequency, length, and content? (2) Which global and cultural issues were most popular among the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi students? (3) What technical, cultural and communication difficulties did the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi instructors and students have in the online learning environment? (4) What is the effect of the online project on the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi students' skills development in EFL as perceived by the students and their instructor? (5) What effects did the online project have on the students' attitudes towards online learning, and interacting with students from other cultures, and towards the global and cultural issues discussed?

A content analysis of students' reactions to the discussion threads in terms of message length and content was carried out. The impact of the online project on the EFL Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi students' skills and attitudes towards online interaction and global and cultural issues was based on qualitative analyses of students' responses to the

post-project questionnaire, their comments and reactions, as well as instructors' observations and comments will be reported.

2. Subjects

Twenty-four Ukrainian students from Lviv National Ivan Franko University, Ukraine; fifteen Russian students from Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences; and twenty two Saudi students from the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia participated in the online project in Spring 2003. The Saudi students were all females. The Ukrainian and Russian students were history and sociology majors, whereas the Saudi students were translation majors. The Ukrainian students were freshman and sophomores. Their English proficiency level ranged between pre- and upper-intermediate. The Russian students were sophomores and their proficiency level ranged between upper-intermediate and advanced. The Saudi students were sophomores and their proficiency level ranged between low- and upper-intermediate. The Ukrainian and Russian students were enrolled in a general English course with an English for Special Purposes (ESP) component, i.e. English for history and sociology. The aim of the course was to develop the students' speaking, reading and writing skills and vocabulary knowledge in their major area of specialization. The Saudi students were enrolled in a Language and Culture course, which aimed at developing the students' awareness of the relationship between language and culture in general, and of English and British and American cultures in particular. The Ukrainian and Russian students share similar Eastern European, Roman Orthodox, and former Soviet cultures, whereas the Saudi students share the same Arabic and Islamic cultures, live in a conservative society and study in a gender-based educational setting. The Ukrainian and Russian students had no prior experience with online learning, whereas the Saudi students had prior experience with online writing instruction with Blackboard from home and were concurrently enrolled in an online course with Nicenet which was used a supplement to the Language and Culture course they were taking.

The author had prior experience with online teaching using Blackboard and Nicenet. Her Ukrainian and Russian colleagues had no prior experience in online instruction. They

attended a workshop on teaching EFL writing online using Blackboard and Nicenet that the author gave at the TESOL Ukraine conference in January 2003. During that conference, the Ukrainian colleague showed an interest in sharing an online course with the author in the spring semester that started shortly after the conference was finished (in February 2003).

3. In-class Instruction

The Ukrainian and Russian students were enrolled in a General English course with ESP elements, i.e. English for history and sociology. The class met twice a week for 90 minutes, with a total of 72 hours of English over the whole semester. The aim of the course was to develop the students' reading, writing and general communication skills. For their face-to-face class (in-class instruction), the students used "*Reward*" Intermediate from Macmillan. The book was supplemented by an ESP component covering topics in history and sociology.

The Saudi students were enrolled in a Language and Culture course (two hours per week), with a total of 28 hours over the whole semester. The aim of the course was to develop the students' awareness of the relationship between language and culture, awareness of British and American cultures and mastery of culture-related terminology. The in-class material for the course covered several topics about British and American cultures (see Appendix 1).

4. Procedures

4.1 Creating the Course

An online course was created with Nicenet as it was free. The course was called *"Writing across the Borders"*. It was used as a supplement to in-class instruction. The aim of the project was to develop students' writing skills in EFL and to develop their awareness of global and cultural issues and events, and give them an opportunity to interact and communicate with students from other countries. The aim of the online course was explained to the students, they were given the class key, and then they enrolled

themselves. The Ukrainian and Russian students accessed the Nicenet course from their college computer labs and checked the online course during and after the class session. The Saudi students accessed the online course from home, as they had no internet access from college.

4.2 The Online Course Components and Content

The online course consisted of 11 conferencing topics (discussion threads), 20 external links, 9 documents, 3 assignments, an online photo gallery and PowerPoint presentations (See Appendix 2).

For the Ukrainian and Russian students, the content of the online course was not related to the *Reward* textbook used in class. The online material was an obligatory part of the ESP course. The Ukrainian students could print the documents from the *"Documents" section* and study them at home. They discussed the conferencing topics in class, studied the new vocabulary items and took the quizzes. Some of the questions on the final exam covered the online course materials. The amount of participation in the Nicenet course was taken into consideration when each student was given a mark for the course.

For the Saudi students, the content of the online course was not related to the Language and Culture course they were taking. The author wanted to give them the opportunity to communicate and interact with students from other cultures, which was unprecedented in Saudi Arabia. Participation in the project was optional, as most of the students might have been psychologically and culturally inhibited to participate (See *the Instructors Role* Section below). Material in the online course was not brainstormed in class, due to limited class time. The students read the online documents, checked the links and posted responses to the discussion threads whenever they wanted. Quizzes and the final exam did not cover any of the online material. The students were given extra credit for participation.

4.3 Instructors' Role

The Ukrainian and Russian instructors provided training in using the Nicenet online course and brainstormed the discussion threads before and after the students posted their responses. During the course, the three instructors agreed on the discussion threads to be posted in the online course. They posted the documents and external links. Due to the author's experience with online writing instruction in EFL, she helped in planning and managing the online course and provided her colleagues with feedback and suggestions on how to phrase the discussion topics, how many topics to post per week, when to post, how to respond to the students, and what external links to post during the project. The Ukrainian instructor always asked the author questions and was writing to her Russian colleague on a regular basis about what their students were doing and what they were going to do next, although they were doing different things in class.

All of the instructors gave the students positive feedback and encouraged them to communicate and interact and not to worry about spelling, grammatical, punctuation and capitalization mistakes. They did not correct anything that the students posted. The students felt free to express themselves and their own points of view. The instructors shared in the discussion, and always posted responses to the new discussion threads. Thus a warm and secure learning environment was created.

In addition, the author gave moral support for the Saudi students whenever they stopped by her office to tell her about their concerns. At first they were shy, apprehensive and hesitant to register, as they were used to learning in a gender-based environment (female students and female instructors only). They thought that sharing an online course with students from other countries would be like a chat-room, where male and female students chat rather than study. Some of them told her that they wanted to conceal their identity by registering using a male's name, using their first name and initials, deleting their e-mails, or using "anonymous" instead of their real names. The author had to assure them that all course activities were monitored by three instructors and that Ukrainian and Russian students are respectful and serious. She told them about her visit to Ukraine and experience with Ukrainian students. She encouraged them to register using their real

names and gave them extra credit for participating in the online course. Despite that, only half of the students who were registered in *Language and Culture* online course participated in the *Writing across the Borders* online course.

4.4 Instruments

At the end of the course, all of the students were e-mailed an open-ended questionnaire which consisted of several questions (See Appendix 3). Another questionnaire was e-mailed to the instructors (See Appendix 4). Only Ukrainian and Saudi students and instructors responded to and returned the questionnaires. Russian students and their instructor did not, although the authors e-mailed the questionnaires twice. The author knew the Ukrainian instructor very well and both were corresponding before and throughout the course. The author had an opportunity to meet with some of the Ukrainian students when she went to the TESOL Ukraine conference. In addition, the Ukrainian instructor urged her students to answer the questionnaires although the course was over. On the contrary, the author did not know the Russian instructors very well and her request of the Russian students to answer the questionnaire was not supported by their instructor, i.e. the personal rapport part was not present. Thus it was not possible to compare the Russian students' reactions and attitudes with those of the Ukrainian and Saudi students although positive impressions about their online experience could be inferred from their posts. Qualitative analyses of the questionnaire, and instructor comments and observations are reported below. Qualitative analyses are reported in the form of statements quoted from the students' Reponses.

4.5 Data Analysis

The frequency of student posts, the total number of posted messages under all the discussion threads, number of responses posted under each discussion thread, the percentage of messages posted by each group of students, and discussion threads with the highest and lowest responses were calculated. The mean, median and range of message length were also calculated for each group.

5. Project Outcomes

5.1 Description of Student Posts

Analysis of the students' messages and reactions showed that all of the students posted a total of 186 responses (posts) under the discussion threads (instructors' messages were excluded). The Ukrainian students posted 67%, the Russians posted 23%, and the Saudis posted 10% of the responses. 24% of the students did not post anything (one Ukrainian, five Russians and eleven Saudis). The typical Ukrainian student posted 5 messages (Range = 1 to11 messages), the typical Russian student posted 3 messages (Range = 1 to 7 messages) and the typical Saudi student posted one message (Range = 1 to 4 messages). None of the students took the initiative to post any conferencing topics or links related to any global or cultural issue (See Table 1).

Table (1)

Frequencies, Percentages, Medians and Ranges of Students' Posts

	Frequency of Posts	*% of Posts*	*Median*	*Range*
Ukrainians	125	67%	5	1-11
Russians	43	23%	3	1-7
Saudis	38	10%	1	1-4
Total	186			

The discussion threads with the highest number of responses were: *Welcome,* in which the students introduced themselves (23%), *Voices on Iraq* (19%), *Culture Shock* (14.5%), *Culture Awareness and Mass Media* (12%), *Man against Women* (10%), *Beliefs, Rumors and Prejudices* (10%), *Netiquette* (7.5%), and the closing thread *Thanks to Everyone* (2%). These percentages reflect familiarity with the topic, relevance to current global events, interest, relationship of the topic to students' personal experiences and knowledge, and degree of abstractness (See Appendix 2 and Table 2).

Table (2)

Distribution of Students' Posts According to Topic

Discussion Threads	%
Welcome	23%
Voices on Iraq	19%
Culture Shock	14.5%
Culture Awareness and Mass Media	12%
Man Against Women	10%
Beliefs, Rumors and Prejudices	10%
Netiquette	7.5%
Thanks to Everyone	2%

The responses that the Russian students posted under '*Welcome'* ranged between 110-215 words (Median = 178 words), those posted by the Ukrainian students ranged between 12 and195 words (Median = 82 words), and those posted by the Saudis ranged between 27 and 140 words (Median = 53 words) (See Table 3). The conferencing topic with the longest responses was *'Voices on Iraq'* due to exposure to a flow of information from the media before and after the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. Students were also emotionally involved in the event. The Russian students were the most proficient in writing, as they were enrolled in a British-Russian university. Most of the responses posted by the Saudi students were under *'Welcome'*, one was posted under *'Culture Shock'*, and two were posted under *'Voices on Iraq'*. The responses the Saudi students posted under *'Welcome'* were short and brief. They just gave their name, age, major, name of institution, thanked their instructor for giving them the opportunity to participate, and expressed their interest in the cultural exchange. On the other hand, the

Ukrainian and Russian students talked about their towns, jobs, and personal experiences (See the Appendix 5). The Saudi students posted few responses after the author finished teaching them and as the author had no control over quizzes, grades and participation. They probably could not generate ideas. However, they continued to check and read the documents and posts.

Table (3)

Description of Message Length in Words

	Median	Range
Russian	178	110-215
Ukrainian	82	12-195
Saudi	53	27-140

5.2 Difficulties

Responses to the questionnaires showed that the Ukrainian students had limited access to the computer lab and none of them had a PC at home. They had difficulty connecting to the Internet, which made browsing slow, tedious and sometimes impossible. 30% did not have time to respond to the discussion threads, 20% could not access the Nicenet course, 20% found the documents difficult to understand, as they came across difficult words and spent a lot of time looking up their meanings, 30% were not familiar with the discussion topics and could not generate ideas and 10% had little experience with the Internet (See Table 4).

Table (4)

Types and Percentages of the Difficulties for the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi Students

	Difficulties	%
Ukrainian	Slow browsing (bad connectivity)	90%
	Did not have time	30%
	Not familiar with discussion topics	30%
	Could not generate ideas	30%
	Could not access the website	20%
	Difficulty with documents	20%
	Little experience with the internet	10%
	Slow browsing	
Russian	Slow browsing	60%
	Did not have time to check website	30%
	Had no access to the internet	20%

Saudi	Bad connectivity	40%
	Did not have time to check website	20%
	Were not interested	20%
	Could not keep up with the posts (browsing was a chore)	10%
	Slow in typing	10%

Responses to the questionnaires also showed that 10% of the Saudi students were slow in typing, and 20% did not have time to check the website. As the number of documents and posts increased, 10% found reading the posts and documents a chore and could not keep up with them. 20% lost interest (See Table 4 and the cultural difficulties that Saudi students had at the beginning of the course in the Instructors' Role section above).

The Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi instructors were doing different things in class and the same thing online. The Ukrainian and Russian instructors checked Nicenet several times a day. Providing feedback and checking the online class participation were difficult for them, because they had many things to do, and had to respond to the students individually. Since they did not have a computer at home, they had to do everything in the office. They came to work early and went home late. A bigger challenge for them was the course documents, finding related links and providing feedback. Preparing the documents was an improvisation, and they thought about the content along the way. Looking for material was also time-consuming. At first, the Ukrainian instructor e-mailed the author on a weekly basis seeking advice. She wanted to post the discussion topics for the whole semester all at once. Some of topics she selected were not specific and she did not know how to handle the course. The author recommended that topics be specific, deal with one issue only, and be related to the students' background knowledge and experiences. She also recommended that instructors post one topic per week, act as a student, write a response whenever she posts a discussion thread and give positive feedback whenever the students post a response no matter how inadequate it is.

Managing the online course was not a burden for the author because of her prior experience with online teaching. The only challenge was to keep her students interested

and lack of computers and Internet access in her college, made it difficult for her to go through the discussions threads in class and solve technical and training problems that the students might have faced.

5.3 Effect on Skills and Attitude

The Ukrainian students reported that the online documents helped them generate ideas for their messages, learn new vocabulary items, and enhanced their reading and writing skills. Their instructor noted that her students' proficiency level in English improved as a result of the online course and the amount of reading and writing they were exposed to. At the end of the semester, they were speaking, reading and writing better. Similarly, the Saudi students reported that their English improved as a result of reading the documents and posts and noting how the Ukrainian and Russian students wrote and thought. They acquired new information and exchanged ideas with students from another culture. Zubashevsky Nazar wrote: *"Yes, my English improved. Yes this course help (helped) me to know many new words, to know more about the opinion of different people to many problems in our life"*. Roksolana Avdykovych wrote: "*My English improved, I know a lot of new words, can speak easier. I didn't know some words, I used a dictionary and read more information on this topic"*. Holub Maria wrote: *"I find it helpful, because (because) it gives to us feeling (and knowledge) of "live" English. The online course gives us something new and interesting information, which is sometimes helpful for us"*. A Saudi participant's (Eman Baghlaf) wrote: "*of course yes because I read different styles of writing… it is a new way of learning ,and I get great benefits because I read , and write , so my skills improved*".

As to students' attitudes towards the cross-cultural online exchange, all of the Ukrainian students enjoyed discussing, and expressing opinions about global and cultural issues and events. They thought the course helped them understand some aspects of "world life" and gave them a feel of "live" English. The Saudi students enjoyed reading the messages and reactions posted by the Ukrainian and Russian students. The instructors noted that their students were very enthusiastic and found the online project exciting. Nazar wrote: *"Yes this course help (helped) me to know more about the opinion of*

different people to many problems in our life… Yes, I want to take part in such curses again". Maria wrote: *"I find it helpful, because (because) it gives to us feeling and knowledge of live English. The online course gives us something new and interesting information, which is sometimes helpful for us … Yes, I would do that (register again in a similar course with students from other countries) if I had such opportunity".* Lyuba said: *"In online courses we changing (exchanging) interesting information with foreing (foreign) students and it is very useful for us".* Oxana and Natalya. wrote: *"The online course is more interesting than traditional in-class instruction".* Eman wrote: *"If I have the chance, of I will register (again in a similar course with students from other countries)… realising the variations of the other cultures, and ways of life in the other countries ... the net is very important especially (especially) if we use this tool for learning".*

Although the Saudi students were apprehensive and hesitant to participate in this project, they found it informative and their experience clarified the misconceptions and fears they had about learning and interacting with students from other countries. Their responses to the questionnaire and oral comments to the author showed that they were impressed by how fast the Ukrainian students responded, how often they wrote, and how long their messages were. They found the Ukrainian and Russian students respectful and interested in discussing global issues, and found the information the students provided about themselves, their universities and towns enriching. It was fascinating for the Ukrainian as well as the Saudi students to be in touch with their instructors who were abroad and to be in the same class with students from other countries.

All of the Ukrainian and Saudi students expressed an interest in continuing the project in the future or participating in similar projects. The following semester, the Ukrainian students used the online documents, discussion materials, and posts for a sociology class that they took the following semester. Helena, the Ukrainian instructor wrote to the author:

> *"I have a group of students who participated in the Nicenet discussion last year (now they are the second year students), and they keep asking me if we are going*

to have something similar this year. They told me that they use their Nicenet discussion materials and postings for their Sociology class. That's interesting!"

However, the Ukrainian, Russian and Saudi students did not exchange any e-mails with other neither during nor after the online course was over.

The positive effect of cross-cultural online collaboration on the Ukrainian and Saudi EFL students' attitudes obtained in the present study is consistent with findings of other cross-cultural collaborative projects between L1 and L2 students and/or pre-service teachers using other forms of technology. For instance, Ruhe (1998) reported that e-mail was effective in teaching cross-cultural awareness, created a positive affective climate, and made the English-for-Academic-Purposes curriculum more relevant to students. In addition, Schoorman and Camarillo (2000) noted that e-mail exchanges between university pre-service teachers and middle school students broadened their multicultural awareness and improved their skills. Target language usage and interest increased over the duration of the project. Electronic exchange between the schools enhanced the language learning skills of all students involved in the project (Shelley, 1996). Web resources proved to be a suitable tool for increasing language and cultural knowledge, as well as a means for increasing motivation (Osuna & Meskill, 1998; Lee, 1997). They were a meaningful way to integrate language and culture and to provide opportunities for students to learn about the target culture while using e-mail to discuss cultural aspects with native speakers. E-mail increased students' interest and motivation. Likewise, Lee (1998) reported that online newspapers and online chat rooms improved advanced Spanish college students' language and reading skills, and increased their cultural knowledge.

By contrast, findings of the present study are inconsistent with findings of Chen's study (2001) which found that Taiwanese freshman students exposed to American culture in a constructivist CALL environment. Chen's results indicated that college EFL learners' attitudes towards learning American culture and learning styles did not undergo any significant change. The more the subjects participated in the CALL environment, the

less they felt that information on the Internet helped them understand American culture, and the less they liked exploring American culture via the Internet.

6. Conclusion

Online instruction in EFL is not widely used in Ukraine, Russia and Saudi Arabia. So the *Writing across the Borders* online course was a pioneer project in those countries. The project was found to be effective and successful. The interaction between those instructors and students who belonged to two completely different cultural, political, linguistic and educational backgrounds, and different majors: Saudi vs Ukrainian-Russian was impressive. It showed that students from different countries have common interests and common points of views regarding some global cultural issues. In their responses to the questionnaire, the students reported that they developed a global perspective as well as language and communication skills. They developed a positive attitude towards other cultures and learnt to accept and respect differences in points of views, beliefs and traditions. Such an effective project did not need any financial support, no special hardware or software, and no re-scheduling. EFL students and instructors in low-tech learning environments can still use collaborative online instruction with Nicenet, Moodle or OWCP effectively even as a supplement to in-class instruction. They can share experiences, instructional materials and try out new teaching techniques.

Cross-cultural online projects could become more effective in enhancing students' attitudes and skills, if collaborating instructors focus on the same skill in-class and online, and all groups use the same in-class material. They can pre-plan the course and agree on the cultural topics. Discussion topics must be specific, and general and complex topics should be avoided. The students can begin discussing topics related to the students' local cultures, move on to discussing topics related to the target language culture, i.e. American and British cultures, and then discuss global issues. Students must be encouraged to select and post their own discussion threads and culture links and should be given an overview of the course in the *'Assignment'* section at the beginning of the course. It is advisable for instructors to write in the *'Documents'* section and post discussion threads on a regular basis, so that the students have a feel for what is going on.

An online course would be more helpful if it is more structured and deadlines for submitting assignments and responding to a discussion thread are more rigid. Discussion threads can be brainstormed face-to-face, before and after posting messages. Partner instructors can write to each other about their expectations before class, and about how the class actually went. To help students take the online course more seriously, it must be part of the final exam and course credit. Studies that investigate cross-cultural online projects that are fully delivered online and which have identical content and pre- and post-project assessment are called for.

Appendix (1)

Cultural Topics Taught to the Saudi Students in Class

The British and American culture course that the Saudi students took in class covered the following topics: *Definition of culture, difference between culture and civilization, the process of enculturation, characteristics of culture, cultural patterns, cultural traits, multiculturalism, cultural anthropology, cross-cultural, ethnography, location of the UK, different names, political divisions of the UK, general characteristics, British colonies, British history, Industrial Revolution, British government, the constitution, parliament, prime minister and cabinet, politics in the UK, political parties, population, ancestry, language, city life, rural life, food and drink, recreation, religion, educational system, health care system, museums and libraries, the arts, land regions, rivers and lakes, climate, economy, service industries, manufacturing, agriculture, mining, fishing, energy resources, international trade, imports and exports, transportation and communication; U.S. regions, U.S. population, U.S. ancestry, language, urban and rural life in the U.S., schools, museums, religion, recreation, food, the arts, the land, climate, the economy, energy resources, transportation and communication in the U.S.*

Appendix (2)

The Online Course Components and Content

The online course consisted of 11 conferencing topics (discussion threads), 20 external links, 9 documents, 3 assignments, an online photo gallery and Powerpoint presentations. The discussion threads covered the following: *Netiquette, beliefs, rumors and prejudices, cultural shock; impressions about the USA; voices on Iraq; cultural awareness and mass media; man and civilization; education; man against women; thanks to everyone* in addition to the *International Women's Day celebrated on March 8th* and *Easter celebrated on May 27th*. The Documents covered the following topics: *Netiquette Rules* by V. Shea; *Ancient Men and Women; Cross-Cultural Problems; Cultural Dimensions; Fog of War; Truth is the Victim of Collateral Damage; Political Leaders on the War in Iraq; Voices on Iraq; Saddam Defies U.S. Demand to Leave; Coalition for the Immediate Disarmament of Iraq; The Difference in News Coverage by The US Mass Media and Mass Media in Other Countries* from Eugene Weekly. These documents were written,

abridged or modified by the instructors. The external links included the following: *International Writing Exchange; Learning English on the Net; Cindy's Computer Clinic for Beginners; Pictures of King Saud University; Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences; Lviv and Lviv National Ivan Franko University, A Fish out of Water* by Duncan Mason*; Thinkquest: Cultural Connections; Take the Shock out of Culture Shock* by Charlotte Thomas; *A Mini-Lecture on Culture Shock* by Randall Davis*; The Problem Of Adjustment to New Cultural Environments; Culture Shock* by Carmen Cuanipa*; Language and Gender; On-line Netiquette; Netiquette Rules; Uncle Sam* (a cartoon published by the students of the McConnell Center for Political Leadership); *Events Leading to the Brink of War* (a timeline); *Bush: Leave Iraq within 48 hours* (a transcript from CNN of President Bush's Monday night televised address to the nation); *Postwar Plans* (a cartoon published by startribune.com). The Photo galleries and Powerpoint presentations showed pictures of Ukraine, Russia and Riyadh and the three institutions.

Appendix (3)

Students' Questionnaire

1. *Name (Optional):*
2. *Why did you register in and use the Nicenet online course?*
3. *What did you like about the Nicenet online course? What did you not like about it?*
4. *Did you communicate with your online classmates from other countries outside the course (send private e-mails to each other)?*
5. *Did your English improve as a result of using the online course ? In what ways?*
6. *Did it make any difference in learning English?*
7. *If you did not post any responses or paragraphs in the online course? Why?*
8. *What problems or difficulties did you face in using the online course? How were those problems solved?*
9. *How much time did you spend using and browsing the online course?*
10. *Would you register again in a similar course with students from other countries? Why?*
11. *What do you think of the cultural topics discussed in the online course?*

Appendix (4)

Instructors' Questionnaire

1. What course were the students enrolled in (in class)?
2. How many hours a week was it?
3. What was the students' proficiency level at the beginning of the semester?
4. Did the students' English improve as a result of using the Nicenet course? In what ways?
5. What textbook did you use for the course?
6. What skills did the textbook and course emphasize?
7. Were the conferencing topics posted related to the textbook?
8. Where did the students access the Nicenet course from?
9. Where did you access the Nicenet course from?
10. Did you face any problems or difficulties in using the Nicenet course?
11. How much time did it take you to prepare for the Nicenet course and check the Nicenet website?
12. How did you coordinate the Nicenet course with your colleagues from the other country?
13. Did any of the questions on the final exam cover any material or information covered in the Nicenet course?
14. Did you give marks for using the Nicenet course?
15. How did the students feel about sharing an online course with students from other countries?
16. If you were to teach the same online course again with instructors from other countries, what would you change?

Appendix (5)

Examples of Saudi, Ukrainian and Russian Students' Posts

Below are examples of the students' posts and comments. Posts and comments are left as they were originally written by the students.

Examples of Saudi students' posts (unedited):

(i) *hellow every body.. I am so glad to have international friends and teachers in the same time .. That is what I always lookin for.. I will introduce myself.. I am Nada. I`m 20 years old .. I`m from K.S.A .. I`m A student in king Saud university in Riyadh city .. My major is English Language & Translation.. I`m in the 2nd year. Also, I wana told you that I always belive in this (WhO I aM Is NoT WhAt I hAve But WhAt I tRy My* bEst At). *I often hear about Russia but I have no clear idea about it , so I think now I have friends from that area & I am sure that they will give me some information about it ... thankx anyway for being speacial members & friends in our site & a speacial thanks for Prof. reima.*

(ii) *My name is Nouf, 20 years old. I'm a Saudi. I'm also one of Prof. Reima's students and I really appreciate what she's doing to us. I'm so excited to be in this class and I'm hoping if i could reach a higher level in writing. Finally, just remember that when everything seems against you, that the airplane takes off against the winds, NOT with it.*

(iii) *Heloooo everyone. Im Fatima frome Saudi Arabia and Im 19 years old. Im studing Languages and Translation in King Saud University. Im looking forward to get to know new friends.*

Examples of Russian Students' posts (unedited):

(i) *Hello! Let me introduce my self My name is Eugueny, I m from Omsk, this city is situated in Siberia. It is a very quiet town because it very far from Moscow and Europe with their trouble. Now I live in Moscow and studying in Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. In this school we have a lot of meetings with very*

interesting people who speak about world economical and political processes, it is very interesting. My hobbies are reading, swimming and computing, I like it. How are you? What are your hobbies and interests? Write me a letter. I am looking forward to hearing from you. Good Luck! Eugueny.

(ii) *My name is Galina. I am from an ancient town Serpukhov in Moscow Region which used to be the southern point of the Moscow defensive triangle.*
Now I live in Moscow, as I study and work here.

I am a student at the Russian-British University Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences. The School integrates the best aspects of British and Russian academic traditions and provides a wide range of interesting courses in different spheres, such as Law, Sociology, Political Science, Cultural Management, etc.

My avocation is studying foreign languages. The courses provided by the Academic Linguistic Center of the School are intensive and effective. I enjoy them exceedingly. Apart from this, I started learning Italian four months ago, and I've found it to be quite an interesting and useful occupation.

At the present time, I participate in a new project 'Writing across the Borders'. In the frame of this course the students are supposed to work out a Profile of the Ukraine and present the results in the format of Power Point Presentation 'My View of the Ukraine'.

My colleagues and I are looking forward to corresponding with you and trying to find out as much interesting information about your country as only possible.
Sincerely yours, Galina Savostyanova

Examples of Ukrainian Students' posts (unedited):

(i) *I would like to introduce myself. My name is Tania Rodnienkova. I like my studying in Lviv I. Franco National University because classes aren't so boring as I was told earlier and appears rather interesting. But most of all I like University because of possibility meeting new people- confident and fresh thinking. I'm studying Sociology. About myself. I have a lot of hobbies. I like going in for sports (especially basket-ball), listening to the music and watching old black and white films. Besides I'm fond of computer design. When I have free time I like painting and reading. I like modern Ukrainian literature. I'm interesting in developing Ukrainian culture- modern art and literature, Ukrainian underground music and culture. I adore travelling and spending days off in the open air.*

Examples of Students' Comments (unedited):

(1) *Hello, dear colleagues!!! Lyuba Samets and Roksolana Avdykovych are writing to you. It was very interesting to work with you, to read your messages, to discuss different topics. It was really useful and instructive for us. We think that most of us agree to continue this project in the future. We thank our teachers for the interesting information in Documents section. We took a lot of useful rare information from it. It helped us in preparing our messages. We thank all students who took part in Writing across the Borders. We wish you to pass all exams and have a good rest.*

(2) *Hello! We have read your letter to us. We think that this writing exchange project helped us to understand the different sides of world life. We liked this project and we hope that we will have such a project in future because it was interesting and helped us to develop the necessary skills and heighten language competence. We hope that the other countries will take part in such projects and we will see the thinks of other people in many countries.*

Yours,

Ukrainian students

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An Investigation into the Task Features Affecting EFL Listening Comprehension Test Performance

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Bio Data

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Abstract

The construct validation of a multiple-choice listening test requires some evidence that text and text associated variables play a significant role in predicting item difficulty. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of task features on test performance in EFL listening tests by determining how well item difficulty can be accounted for by text factors, item factors and text-item factors. A sample of 159 items of CET listening tests was analyzed, based on which a summary of task features of CET listening passages is presented. Furthermore, the results of correlation and regression analyses indicate that text-by-item interaction variables contribute significantly to item difficulty, thereby providing evidence favoring the construct validity of CET listening tests. The two best predictors of item difficulty are the redundancy of necessary information, and lexical overlap between words in the text and words in an item's options.

Key words: test task, construct validity, CET, EFL listening tests

Introduction

In the field of language testing, there is a steadily growing interest in the identification and characterization of those factors which affect the test performance of the language learner with the objective of achieving more informed construct validation results (Bachman, 1990; Foster & Skehan, 1996; McNamara, 1996). Bachman (2002, p. 471) points out that we should clearly distinguish among three sets of factors that can affect test performance:

1) Characteristics inherent in the task itself

2) Attributes of test takers
3) Interactions between test takers and task characteristics

"Language test performance can be attributed to test task features. Their effects may reduce the effect on test performance of the language abilities we want to measure, and hence the interpretability of test scores" (ibid.). It is, therefore, vitally important for language testing researchers to determine what the nature of the relationship between test tasks and test performance is, and how it affects the interpretation of test results. The information can be used as the basis for the improvement of test reliability and validity, and more specifically, for the design of tests for particular populations.

It is out of these considerations that an in-depth analysis is intended in the study to explore the relationship between major test task features and students' test performance in EFL listening tests. The decision on EFL listening tests as the focus of the study is of particular significance in the context of China's college English teaching. Developing students' ability to use English as a tool of communication, especially their listening and speaking abilities, is clearly specified as the objective of college English teaching in China.

The main purpose of the present study focuses upon the construct validity of multiple-choice listening comprehension tests. To be valid, a multiple-choice test of listening must demonstrate sensitivity to the information in the text passages. One serious criticism regarding construct validity of listening tests maintains that examinees do not or need not have to listen to the passage in order to answer the items. Freedle and Kostin (1999) point out that one could counteract such criticisms by showing that some variables that reflect the structure and content of the text passage are significantly correlated with item difficulty. Finding such significant correlations would indicate that examinees are probably paying attention to text information and are using this information to guide their selection of answers to the items. Particularly, they suggest that the lowest level of validity of multiple-choice test requires finding some significant support for the effect of text variables on test item difficulty. Therefore, a related purpose of the study is to

examine whether text and text associated variables play a significant role in predicting item difficulty.

The following two research questions are addressed:

1) What are the major task features of EFL listening tests?
2) How can task features affect performance in EFL listening tests?

Review of related studies

Task features can be further categorized into those related to task input (or text) and those to test item. A review of studies examining task features and test performance suggests that variations in the specific characteristics of task input and test item affect difficulty of items. In listening comprehension we could find only several empirical studies in which a number of factors that may affect listening task difficulty are examined and identified. Freedle and Kostin (1996) examined 337 TOEFL items, which asked a small number of multiple-choice comprehension questions on short-spoken passages. They found that a different set of attributes worked better for each item type. For example, in the case of items that asked for the identification of the main idea, three attributes identified were lexical overlap, rhetorical structure of the passage, and topic.

Nissan et al. (1996) analyzed TOEFL dialogue items and found five significant variables relating to listening performance. The three best predictor variables were (a) the presence of two or more negatives in the dialogues, (b) the need to draw an inference beyond what is explicitly stated in the dialogue, and (c) the pattern of utterances in the dialogue.

Brindley and Slatyer (2002) reported on an exploratory study that examined the effects of task characteristics and task conditions on learner's performance in competency-based listening assessment tasks. Key variables investigated included the nature of the input and the response mode, namely speech rate, text type, number of hearings, input source (live

vs. audio-recorded) and item format. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of test scores indicated that speech rate and item format could affect task and item difficulty.

Kostin (2004) explored the relationship between a set of item characteristics and the difficulty of TOEFL dialogue item. This study has replicated some of the significant findings in Nissan et al. (1996). In particular, it has found that the lexical overlap between words in the text and words in an item's options affect listening item difficulty.

Buck and Tatsuoka (1998) were concerned with identifying cognitive abilities needed to perform short-answer comprehension questions. Three structural components of the listening test tasks have been singled out as influencing item difficulty.

1) The necessary information (NI): This refers to **"**information in the text which the listener must understand to be certain of the correct answer" (Buck & Tatsuoka 1998: 134). The location of the NI and its linguistic characteristics are found to be key factors affecting item difficulty and candidate responses.
2) The surrounding text: This refers to the text immediately surrounding the necessary information. The characteristics of this part of the text are found to have a greater effect on item difficulty than the characteristics of the whole text.
3) The stem: This is defined as the written text on the answer sheet which test takers have in front of them as they listen and which serves both as a listening guide and a structure for the written response. In response-constructed tasks, the stem would be the beginning of the short answer question (SAQ) to be answered.

The present study builds on these findings and explores their applicability in EFL listening comprehension tests in China. On the basis of the literature review, a framework of variables assessing test task features was presented which embraced four groups of variables: text variables, item variables, text/item variables, and item type.

Text variables characterize the content and structure of the listening passage itself and these variables can be further classified in terms of word-level, sentence-level, and discourse-level factors. These variables are related to the linguistic characteristics which have been traditionally associated with comprehension difficulty. Item variables constitute the so-called “pure” item variables which can be coded without reference to the contents of the listening passage. Only the contents of the item itself are used to quantify these particular variables. Three types of item were studied (Freedle and Kostin, 1999): detailed explicit, detail implicit and main idea items. Text-by-item or alternatively text/item overlap variables are defined as variables that necessarily reflect the contents of both the test items as well as the text to which those items apply. These factors typically involve an interaction between features of the text and features of the item. Item types are a special type of text/item overlap and they refer to the response expected from the test taker to the task. In general, there are two types of response: selected and constructed (Bachman, 1990, p. 129).

Materials and method

1. Item sample

The objective of the analysis was to investigate whether two factors of listening tasks - text and test items - exercise a systematic influence on item difficulty. Items were coded on these factors believed to affect performance - vocabulary frequency, syntactic complexity, topic, etc - and then the item score on these factors was used to predict item difficulty.

The 159 listening comprehension items taken from 16 disclosed post-1992 CET Band-4 forms comprise the total item sample. The National College English Test of China (CET) is a national standardized test of English proficiency administered to Chinese college students. Listening comprehension is the first part in the CET. Students should be able to get the gist of the discourse, understand the main points and important details, and recognize the opinion and attitude of the speaker. The listening sub-test has two sections

and lasts 20 minutes. Section A contains ten short conversations and Section B contains three passages.

After each passage, there are three or four questions about it. Each recording is played once only. The passages in Section B are stories, talks, etc on personal life, social and cultural issues, and popular science. Item type includes multiple-choice questions and compound dictation. A more detailed description of the current listening comprehension sub-test is presented in Appendix A. In this study, the correct option will be referred to as the key, and the incorrect options will be referred to as the distracters.

The item sample included 19 inference and 140 explicit questions. As each test form contains three passages and 10 items, there should be 48 passages and 160 items. However, one item was deleted since it is a true-or-false question and does not fit the two question types under investigation. The original data on item difficulty for the 159 items were collected from three different test centers in China and involved approximately 1000 college students learning English as a foreign language. These students were randomly selected from a much larger pool of test takers who responded to each College English Test (CET) Band-4 test form.

2. Study variables

The content and structure of the items and their associated text passages were represented by a set of predictor variables that included a wide variety of text and item characteristics identified from the experimental language-comprehension literature. Given the practical difficulties involved in investigating the effects of all of these variables simultaneously, it was decided to narrow the range of investigation to 24 key variables that seemed most relevant in the context of EFL listening tests under investigation. At the same time, from a theoretical perspective the study presented an opportunity to investigate some of the hypotheses that have been advanced in the research literature concerning those variables that affect second and foreign language listening comprehension.

Below is a summary of the 23 coded variables for initial investigation. Not all variables were used in the analyses. Because of low frequencies of occurrence, defined as two or fewer occurrences in the N = 159 sample, the variables V02, V03 and V13 were deleted. Thus a total of 19 variables were coded, including 10 text variables, two item variables, and seven text/item variables.

Text variables

Word-level variables

V01: number of words with more than two syllables among first 100 words

V02[a]: presence of an infrequent word which is relevant to responding correctly

An infrequent word refers to a word not in The Most Common 100, 000 Words Used in Conversations (Berger, K. 1977).

V03[a]: presence of an idiom which is relevant to responding correctly

An idiom is defined as an expression consisting of two or more words having a meaning that cannot be deduced from the meanings of its constituent parts in the American Heritage Dictionary (2000).

Sentence-level variables

V04: average number of words of text's sentence

V05: number of dependent clauses in text

V06: number of words in the longest T-unit

A T-unit is defined as an independent clause with any attached dependent clauses (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1994).

Discourse-level variables

V07: number of negations in text

Negative markers (e.g., no and not) are counted, as well as negative prefixes (e.g., un- and dis-). Negative tags are also counted, even if their meaning is not negative.

V08: number of interrogative sentences

V09: number of references

V10: coherence (1 = min coherence; 3 = max coherence).

High coherence means elements of opening text sentence densely represented throughout text, etc.

V11: position of main idea in text

(0 = main idea implicit; 1 = in last text sentence; 2 = in middle of text; 3 = among first three sentences)

V12: rhetorical organization

(description, causation, comparison)

V13[a]: topic of text (0 = non-academic topic; 1 = academic topic)

Item variables

V14: explicit (e.g., What is the boiling point of lead?)

V15: inference (e.g., According to the passage, one can infer…)

Text/Item variables

V16: position of necessary information

(1 = among the last three sentences; 2 = in middle of text; 3 = among first three sentences)

Necessary information (NI) refers to "information in the text which the listener must understand to be certain of the correct answer" (Buck & Tatsuoka, 1998, p. 134)

V17: indication of necessary information (explicit indication that NI is coming next)

V18: redundancy of necessary information (all, or part of NI is repeated in text)

V19: number of words in the key

V20: lexical overlap in the key (key have more words than distracters overlap with words in text)

V21: lexical overlap in distracters (distracters have more words than key overlap with words in text)

V22: use of background knowledge to infer the answer

Dependent variable

V23: item difficulty (equated delta, a standardized measure of difficulty)

Finally, it should be noted that this study did not examine phonological features of test tasks, although previous studies have demonstrated effects of acoustic input on listening comprehension (e.g., Yong Zhao, 1997). The reason is that phonological factors including accent, speech rate and sandhi are under strict control in test design of CET listening.

3. Procedure

The first data analysis task involved coding each of the 48 passages for the use of task input features. The analysis was based on the coding of the researcher. A second coder was recruited to establish inter-coder reliability for those variables requiring subjective judgment. The correlation coefficient between the two coders on a sample of 12 passages and 40 items is .86. The high inter-coder reliability ensures the use of one researcher for the rest of the coding.

As preliminary procedures, descriptive statistics were first generated from the data for the purpose of indicating that the central tendency and the dispersion were generally in normal distribution way in order to ensure that the subsequent statistics are valid for the research questions.

A series of ANOVAs was conducted with text organization as the grouping factor. It was expected to discover whether passages of different text organizations may vary in text features. Afterwards, correlations between three sets of task factors (i.e., text variables, item variables**,** and item/text variables) and item difficulty were computed. Multiple regressions were subsequently used to identify the best predictors of item difficulty from the four sets of variables considered together. It was expected to identify the variables predictive to item difficulty, or more specifically, to explore specific task features associated with certain level of item difficulty.

Results and discussion

1. Overall results of text materials

In response to the first research question “what are the major task input features of EFL listening tests”, CET listening passages were analyzed in terms of text variables which characterize the content and structure of the passage itself. The results obtained help us to make a summary of task input features of listening comprehension passages (see Appendix 1). Among the 48 passages, the plurality of text organization comes from

description, followed by argumentation and comparison. Listening passages show no significant difference in a number of text features, including text length, vocabulary frequency, syntactic structure, and content. Moreover, most passages are highly coherent and the main idea is explicitly stated among the first three text sentences.

Meyer's (1985) framework of rhetorical organization was modified to define passage groups in the study. During the coding procedure, it was recognized that there is a certain amount of overlap in the text organization. For example, the problem-solution might contain elements of causation, whereas the listing structure might contain elements of both. In addition, since too many text types would complicate the research design, it was therefore decided to adopt only three types of rhetorical organization: description, comparison and causation.

The variables of coherence and text organization present a highly centralized distribution around the median, suggesting the consistency of text type used. ANOVA results indicate number of dependent clauses is a significant factor among rhetorically different texts (see Appendix 2). The causation text contains significantly more dependent clauses. It is also worth noting that significant differences exist in number of negations between texts of causation and comparison.

Another interesting finding involves the topic of passages. The variable V13 was developed to reflect academic vs. nonacademic topics. Differential familiarity with different topics covered by listening passages may play a role in accounting for listening performance. It seems likely that items that inquire about the nonacademic topics may, because of their greater general familiarity, be easier than items about academic topics. However, only three passages involve an academic topic in the passage sample, suggesting that CET listening passages are not field-specific. Thus the construct-irrelevant variance in topical familiarity can be minimized, and the content validity of the test can be ensured.

In summary, the findings concerning text variables can provide clear evidence for the construct validation of CET-4 listening tests. Validity centers on the extent to which inferences and interpretations from test scores are supported by the evidence available, what the assessment instrument measures. Bachman (1996) describes validation as a general process that consists of the gathering of evidence to support a given interpretation or use, a process that is based on logical, empirical and ethical considerations. Thus validation should ensure that the differences in test performance of different test taker groups are related primarily to the abilities that are being assessed and not to construct-irrelevant factors.

Construct-irrelevant factors in terms of content bias include topical knowledge and technical terminology, specific cultural content and dialect variations. Format bias could include multiple-choice, constructed response, computer-based responses, and multi-media materials. Other key construct-irrelevant factors include insensitive or offensive test materials and materials that stereotype and show certain test taker groups in an unfavorable light (Kunnan, 2000, p. 3). Our results demonstrate that construct-irrelevant factors in terms of test materials are not related to performance in the context of CET-4 listening tests.

2. Correlations between task variables and item difficulty

Table 1 presents those variables that are correlationally significant in predicting item difficulty. Of the 19 variables examined, four variables yielded a significant correlation ($p < .05$) with item difficulty (equated delta).

- V10: coherence of text
- V15: inferencing
- V18: redundancy of necessary information
- V20: lexical overlap in the key
- V21: lexical overlap in distracters

As expected, other task features (e.g., linguistic and discourse features of passages) did not significantly contribute to the listening item model. Overall, the correlation results suggest that many of those variables found to influence comprehension in the experimental language comprehension literature also influence our multiple-choice listening data.

Table 1

Correlations between item difficulty and task variables

			Item difficulty	Coherence	Question type	Redundancy of necessary information	Lexical overlap in the key	Lexical overlap in distracters
Spearman's rho	Item difficulty	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.195*	-.219**	-.388**	-.356**	.404**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.014	.005	.000	.000	.000
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Coherence	Correlation Coefficient	.195*	1.000	.063	-.219**	-.116	-.083
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.	.432	.005	.145	.300
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Inferencing	Correlation Coefficient	-.219**	.063	1.000	.174*	.060	-.199*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.432	.	.028	.450	.012
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Redundancy of necessary information	Correlation Coefficient	-.388**	-.219**	.174*	1.000	.007	-.189*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.028	.	.928	.017
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Lexical overlap in the key	Correlation Coefficient	-.356**	-.116	.060	.007	1.000	-.181*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.145	.450	.928	.	.022
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Lexical overlap in distracters	Correlation Coefficient	.404**	-.083	-.199*	-.189*	-.181*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.300	.012	.017	.022	.
		N	159	159	159	159	159	159

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The first variable whose *p* value is less than the critical probability is V10 (coherence of text); the correlation (r = .195*, N = 159) that text with high coherence was associated with easier listening items, as expected. Coherence is characterized as the degree of unity,

or how well a text holds together. A well-organized text would be better recalled, and a tight top-level rhetorical organization would enhance comprehension because the ideas in the text are closely interlinked (Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Meyer et al., 1993).

The variable V15 (inferencing) is significantly correlated with item difficulty (r = -.219**, N = 159), indicating that items are more difficult when an inference is required to respond correctly. This result was expected in that making inferences is more cognitively demanding, and consequently, may impede listening comprehension performance.

With regard to this result, the question arises whether question type might threaten test validity. If scores on a listening comprehension test reflect only language comprehension, item scores should be predictable only from linguistic features of the items and from the language comprehension skills of the students. Other item features, such as question type of items, are not supposed - or even allowed - to influence the performance of students. However, only 19 of the 159 items in this study, about 12% of the items, were coded for this variable. This renders it impossible to draw conclusions about the effect of question type on item difficulty.

The third variable meeting the critical probability criterion is V18 (redundancy of necessary information). V18 correlates positively with item difficulty (r = .388**, N = 159). When the necessary information was repeated, items were easier. This is consistent with previous studies. Necessary information refers to information in the text that listeners must understand to respond correctly. Its location and linguistic characteristics are found to be key factors affecting item difficulty and candidate responses (e.g., Buck & Tatsuoka, 1998).

In addition, some researchers maintain that redundancy has a significant effect on listening-item comprehension. For example, Chiang and Dunkel (1992) found that

redundancy does play a significant role in comprehension; Parker and Chaudron (1987) found that repetition of the information plus clear segmenting of the thematic structure enhanced orally comprehension. Therefore, the repetition of necessary information is undoubtedly associated with easier items.

There are substantial lexical overlap effects operating in listening. The two lexical overlap variables (V20, V21) yielded significant coefficients for prediction of item difficulty. Lexical overlap between words in the key and words in the relevant text sentence was significant for listening passages (r = -.356**, N = 159). A significant and fairly strong positive correlation exists between lexical overlap between words in the distracter and words in the relevant text sentence and item difficulty. (r = .404**, N = 159).

The variable V20 (lexical overlap in the key) was negatively related to item difficulty, indicating that items with a high percentage of lexical overlap in the key tend to be easier items. Similar findings in regard to percentage of lexical overlap in the key have been reported for TOEFL mini-talks (Freedle & Kostin, 1999) and for TOEFL reading (Freedle & Kostin, 1993). One might be concerned that a test taker having little or no comprehension of a passage could nevertheless perform well on CET items by simply choosing the option that had the most lexical overlap with the passage. Some information relevant to this concern is provided by results regarding V20. Only 36 of the 159 items in this study, about 23% of the items, were coded for this variable. Thus, using a strategy of selecting the option with the most lexical overlap would certainly fail to yield a good score on this item type.

The findings also suggest that item difficulty is also related to lexical overlap between words in the distracters and words in the passage. The correlation for V21 (lexical overlap in distracters) indicates that items tend to be easier when no distracter has more words that overlap with the passage than does the key. This suggests that if distracters

had more lexical overlap with the passage as compared to the key, the item would be harder. Items tend to be harder when all three distracters have more words overlapping with the passage than does the key.

The direction with which these four variables correlated with item difficulty is consistent with the findings in the research literature. This provides evidence to suggest that the results regarding some of these variables will be successfully replicated.

3. Regression analyses

In response to the second research question "how do task features affect performance in EFL listening tests", regression analyses were performed with item difficulty as the dependent variable.

Linear regression is employed to model the value of dependent variable (item difficulty) based on its linear relationship to predictors (V01, V04, V05, V06, V07, V08, V09 and V19). As is shown in Table 2, the small value of R squared indicates that the model does not fit the data well. Only 4.7% of variation in the dependent variable could be explained by the regression model. As expected, average sentence length and syntactic complexity effects were not significant for listening items. ANOVA summarizes the results of variance analysis. The significance value of F is larger than 0.05, indicating that these text variables on word and sentence levels can not explain the variation in item difficulty.

Table 2

Results of linear regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.217 [a]	.047	-.004	.15921

a. Predictors: (Constant), V19, V04, V07, V08, V01, V09, V05, V06

The categorical nature of the variables V10, V11, V12, V15, V16, V17, V18, V20, V21, and V22 and the nonlinear relationship between these task input variables and item difficulty suggest that nonlinear regression may perform better than standard regression. When all the independent variables were entered as a block, the fit of the model was very strong. Measures of the model fit are displayed in Table 3. The overall F = 6.302, *p* <.001; the multiple-R = .613, the R-squared = .316, which accounts for 31.6% of the item difficulty variance. The significance value of the F statistics means that the variation explained by the model is not due to chance. Apparently, the independent variables do a good job explaining the variation in the dependent variable. The multiple-R shows the overall correlation between predictors and the dependent variable is fairly strong.

Table 3

Results of nonlinear regression

Multiple R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
.613	.376	.316

Dependent Variable: Item difficulty
Predictors: V10 V11 V12 V15 V16 V17 V18 V20 V21 V22

The statistical results reported here clearly demonstrate that task input and test item both contribute to the prediction of item difficulty. The regression procedure yielded three significant predictors of item difficulty:

- V18: redundancy of necessary information
- V20: lexical overlap in the key
- V21: lexical overlap in distracters

Lexical overlap in distracters is the best predictor of item difficulty (β= 0.32). The second best predictor is redundancy of necessary information (β = -0.25), followed by lexical overlap in the key (β = -0.23). The direction with which these variables correlated with item difficulty is consistent with the previous findings. It should be noted that although the standardized coefficients were statistically significant, they were quite small in value, ranging form 0.23 to 0.32. . In general, it seems fair to say that the findings from this study are to a certain degree consistent with Freedle and Kostin's (1996) assertion that

lexical overlap and necessary information can be singled out as influencing item difficulty.

Although, the simple correlation between coherence of text (a text variable) and item difficulty is significant, regression analyses indicate that coherence does not contribute significantly to the prediction of item difficulty. This can be understood since the centralized distribution of the variable may counteract its effect on item difficulty.

It is also worth noting that pure item variables like question type appears to play a weak role in influencing item difficulty, while text and text associated (text/item overlap) variables play by far the major role in accounting for passage item difficulty. We are led to conclude that there is modest evidence to support the claim that the CET listening passages and their associated items appear to be valid in construct.

Conclusion

1. Limitations of the study

There are some serious limitations to the design of the present study. First item difficulty is not the dependent variable of theoretical interest. We are generally far more interested in understanding person performance ability than item difficulty (Buck & Tatsuoka, 1998, p. 126). Our regression analysis puts the emphasis on item characteristics rather than performance ability. Another drawback with the use of regression is that it only provides information about group performance; it cannot tell us what factors specific test takers have mastered. Finally it is appropriate to note that the variables measured in this study are far from being exhaustive or comprehensive. These variables simply come from a survey of the research literature. Clearly these findings are compelling and merit further investigation.

2. Summary of major findings

In this study we have been interested primarily in determining how well the difficulty of listening items can be accounted for by a set of task features which involve text factors, item factors and text-item factors. The results concerning task input variables provide clear evidence for the construct validation of CET-4 listening tests. Listening passages used in CET Band-4 have no significant variance in linguistic characteristics such as vocabulary frequency, syntactic complexity, and content. Particularly, construct-irrelevant factors such as topical familiarity and dialect variations are minimized in the test materials, suggesting that test takers' performance on the test is primarily related to the abilities that are being measured.

More importantly, the empirical results demonstrate the effect of text variables on difficulty of test items and thereby provide evidence of test validity of CET. Two text associated factors (text-item factors) are directly tied to item difficulty in EFL passage listening:

1) **Necessary information** refers to the information in the text which the listener must understand to be certain of the correct answer, and its redundancy clearly contributes to item difficulty.

2) **Lexical overlap** between words in the text and words in an item's options may impact listening item difficulty. Easier items are characterized by a greater amount of lexical overlap between words in the text and words in the correct option. In contrast, if there is a greater degree of lexical overlap between words in the text and words in the incorrect options as compared to the correct option, the item tends to be more difficult.

These findings will, hopefully, inform language test developers and researchers regarding the task features that may influence listening test performance, and therefore, about the construct validation of listening tests. Our results provide clear evidence that examinees do attend to the text passages in answering the test items.

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Appendix 1

Descriptive statistics of text variables

	N	Minimum	Maximu	Mean	Std.	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
No. of words with more than two syllables	48	2.00	18.00	7.3542	3.87293	1.013	.343
Average No. of words of text' s sentence	48	8.00	25.00	14.5000	3.29410	1.135	.343
Number of dependent clauses	48	1.00	13.00	6.1667	2.81586	.640	.343
Number of words in the longest T-unit	48	15.00	39.00	24.7708	5.98665	.368	.343
No. of negation	48	.00	12.00	3.0833	2.40419	1.652	.343
No. of interrogative sentences	48	.00	4.00	.6250	.89025	1.776	.343
No. of references	48	2.00	11.00	4.9375	2.08751	.599	.343
Coherence	48	1.00	3.00	2.7708	.47219	-1.944	.343
Position of main idea	48	.00	3.00	1.9792	1.15758	-.731	.343
Text organization	48	1.00	3.00	1.5833	.70961	.811	.343
Valid N (listwise)	48						

Appendix 2 Effects of text organization

ANOVA: between-subjects effects of text organization

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Number of words with more than two syllables	Between Groups	41.708	2	20.854	1.415	.254
	Within Groups	663.271	45	14.739		
	Total	704.979	47			
Average Number of words of text' s sentence	Between Groups	10.383	2	5.192	.468	.630
	Within Groups	499.617	45	11.103		
	Total	510.000	47			
Number of dependent clauses	Between Groups	70.045	2	35.022	5.208	.009
	Within Groups	302.622	45	6.725		
	Total	372.667	47			
Number of words in the longest T-unit	Between Groups	72.593	2	36.296	1.013	.371
	Within Groups	1611.886	45	35.820		
	Total	1684.479	47			
Number of negation	Between Groups	31.968	2	15.984	3.001	.060
	Within Groups	239.699	45	5.327		
	Total	271.667	47			
Number of interrogative sentences	Between Groups	3.825	2	1.913	2.575	.087
	Within Groups	33.425	45	.743		
	Total	37.250	47			
Number of references	Between Groups	2.657	2	1.329	.296	.745
	Within Groups	202.155	45	4.492		
	Total	204.813	47			
Coherence	Between Groups	.280	2	.140	.619	.543
	Within Groups	10.199	45	.227		
	Total	10.479	47			
Position of main idea	Between Groups	7.554	2	3.777	3.067	.056
	Within Groups	55.425	45	1.232		
	Total	62.979	47			

Post hoc tests of V07 (number of negation)

Dependent Variable: Number of negation

	(I) Text organizatio	(J) Text organizatio	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Games-Howell	Description	Causation	-1.35577	.87569	.290	-3.5667	.8552
		Comparison	1.10256	.60193	.207	-.5348	2.7399
	Causation	Description	1.35577	.87569	.290	-.8552	3.5667
		Comparison	2.45833*	.94520	.043	.0664	4.8502
	Comparison	Description	-1.10256	.60193	.207	-2.7399	.5348
		Causation	-2.45833*	.94520	.043	-4.8502	-.0664

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Associating Interference with Strategy Instruction: An Investigation into the Learning of the Present Continuous

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Bio Data

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Abstract
Analysing errors committed by second language learners in the acquisition of English tenses, particularly the present continuous, can offer great insights into learners' difficulties in acquiring target language rules. Focusing on a set of eight rules governing the use of the present continuous, one of the verb forms frequently employed in daily conversations, the researcher employed elicitation procedures aimed at discovering difficulties encountered by learners in second language acquisition. With reference to the errors analysed, the researcher claims that the learners' first language is not the only *linguistic factor* affecting the acquisition of English tenses. The learners' failure to grasp the significance of auxiliary verbs used in combination with the inflectional suffixes of the main verbs, in particular, has been identified as a factor causing learning difficulties. While the subjects' inability to relate some verb forms to temporal and frequency adverbials may be ascribed to intralingual interference, which is associated with developmental sequence and general learning strategies, it is interesting to note that interference causing a large portion of the errors may be both intralingual and interlingual in nature. On the basis of the data elicited, it is recommended that both finite and non-finite verbs should be explained in relation one another in the syntactic, semantic and morphological aspects. Cognitive and memory-related learning strategies are also recommended to enhance the learning of the present continuous in relation to other verb forms and their associated semantic functions.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, grammar, learning strategies, interference.

Introduction

Learning strategies, which have been defined as "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques used by learners to enhance their own learning" (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992, p. 6), are often considered essential in facilitating the acquisition of a foreign or second

language. More specifically, if teachers intend to maximise learners' potential, efforts need to be made to train learners to use strategies that can improve their learning effectiveness (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This leads us to consider the possible ways in which strategy training should be conducted. If strategies are taught in ways that are not suited to the needs of the learners, it may be difficult to expect any desired result in strategy training over the short term. It is therefore important to look into various factors affecting the learning process before attempts are made to design strategy training.

One of the factors influencing the learning process and the use of strategies mentioned above is interference or negative transfer, which may be defined as "the use of a negative language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language" (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992, p. 205). The term 'interference', however, has also been used to refer to transfer of a learner's previous or existing knowledge of the target language (TL) while learning the same language. Errors may therefore occur as a result of such intralingual interference, which involves an application of general learning strategies similar to those manifested in first language acquisition (Richards, 1971; Lim, 2003a, 2003b). In relation to this, this paper studies the extent to which interference occurs interlingually and intralingually in the acquisition of the present continuous, a verb form frequently used in daily conversations. More specifically, it discusses these two categories of interference in an attempt to find out what possible learning strategies can be taught to learners so as to minimise the effects of interference on the acquisition of English tenses.

Given that strategies may also have to be designed on the basis of our knowledge of interference, which is an important linguistic factor affecting the acquisition of a second or foreign language, it is now appropriate at this juncture to place the present research in the context of other studies by using a framework for second language acquisition (SLA). With regard to this, Ellis (1994) has pointed out that SLA may be investigated in some areas including (1) descriptions of the characteristics of learner language, and (2) learner-internal mechanisms affecting the acquisition and/or the use of their resources in communication. This study involves a detailed description of the *deduced characteristics*

of the learners' errors. They are 'deduced' in the sense that the errors were not obtained from the sentences that learners constructed in compositions, but from the answers elicited through multiple-choice questions that had been specially prepared on the basis of findings obtained in past research and the researchers' personal experience in teaching the learners concerned. The present study also involves an investigation into learner-internal mechanisms that are largely mental in nature. Such mechanisms may involve the transfer of knowledge from their first language, or interference from features of the target language itself. Justification for focusing on these two linguistic factors is based on the rationale that other factors affecting language use (such as affective variables, input and interaction in the process of teaching, and acquisition orders) may be further investigated after these two sources of errors, which are largely cognitive and linguistic in nature, have been sufficiently studied.

As this investigation focuses on the learning of the present continuous, which may often be confused with other verb forms in second or foreign language learning, the analysis will have to focus on the possible ways in which errors have occurred as a result of interference from the learners' first language and the target language itself. Given the focus, two research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

1. Intralingual interference is as significant as interlingual interference in the second language acquisition of the present continuous.
2. Verb forms that cause intralingual confusion in the learning of the present continuous are those that resemble it in terms of grammatical structures and semantic functions.

Given the two research hypotheses, attempts will be made to find out what strategies can possibly be taught to learners to minimise the effects of interference on the learning of English tenses in general and the present continuous in particular. The inclusion of an inquiry into intralingual interference can be attributed to a need to look beyond interference from merely the mother tongue, for scant attention has been paid to the ways in which language learners view intralingual similarities and differences (Lim, 2003a,

2003b). In fact, recent studies (e.g. Jarvis, 2000; Sun, 2000) have focused on similarities and differences between the learners' first language and the target language, rather than those within the target language itself. The importance of studying the present continuous in relation to other verb forms indicating aspect and tense can also be justified by the need to consider a language component in relation to other parts of the language being learnt.

A study of the effects of interference on tense usage may provide implications for the design of strategy training. This is congruent with Rutherford's (1998, p. 1) view that "one cannot have a theory of how something is acquired without a theory of what that something is." In this case, we can find out how tenses can be acquired effectively using some strategies only if we understand how the learning of tense usage is affected by both interlingual and intralingual interference. As interference will be discussed in relation to strategy training, it appears necessary to review some literature pertaining to learning strategies. Oxford (1990, 2001) has classified learning strategies into six types consisting of those in the cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social domains. Of these six categories, memory-related and cognitive strategies are closely associated with both interference and strategy training and will therefore form the focus of the present study. On the one hand, memory-related strategies, among others, may involve the creation of mental images, application of images and sounds, review of information and the use of gestures or actions. On the other hand, cognitive strategies may involve practices, reception and conveyance of messages, analysis and reasoning as well as creation of a structure for input and output. Some of the strategies in these two categories will be discussed in relation to the two types of interference explained above.

Research design and procedures

Given the research hypotheses and the scope of the study, the design and procedures employed in the present study will be discussed. The research employed in this study was basically deductive in that it began with an observed regularity that needed to be

described and explained (Blaikie, 2002). This means that the hypotheses mentioned above were deduced and then tested by collecting appropriate data which could be used to either support or reject the hypotheses. As a wider range of proficiency levels were required to reflect the general tendencies in tense usage, a purposive sampling technique was employed. To be specific, all the 51 fourth form learners in a national secondary school in Penang were selected. The sample consisted of all Malay learners, aged between 15 and 17, and most of them had studied English as a second language in primary and secondary schools for an average of 10.8 years and had sat for the English paper in the Lower Secondary Assessment Examination in Form Three. Most of them (92.2%) passed the English paper and 66.7% of them scored a grade B or C in the English paper. While a tenth (9.8%) of them scored a distinction in the paper, 15.7% scored a grade D in the examination and only 7.8% of the subjects failed in the examination. The profile indicated that the respondents had generally reached a reasonable proficiency level to answer the multiple-choice items presented in the questionnaire, which consisted of (1) a section with questions eliciting learners' biographical information, and (2) another section that elicited different responses to multiple-choice items.

A total of 15 multiple-choice items requiring the use of the present continuous were set. Each item comprised five choices that competed with the expected answer in the semantic, syntactic and/or orthographic aspects, and had certain linguistic features in common with the expected grammatical choice (Corder, 1973). The researcher determined the choices on the basis of the deductive design explained above by considering (1) the errors that the students normally committed in spoken and written discourse in the form of conversations and essays, and (2) some common errors discussed in previous studies (e.g. Richards, 1971; Duskova, 1979; Wijaya, 1979; Wong and Lim, 1983; Lee, 1995).

As the items were intended to assess the subjects' knowledge of the rules governing the use of the present continuous in various situations, the subjects were asked to respond to items that assessed their knowledge of the meanings of various verb forms, particularly

the present continuous. The researcher decided to use multiple-choice items in an attempt to avoid off-the-wall responses and to ensure that answers were convenient to code and analyse (Heaton, 1988). In order to include a wide range of situations in which the present continuous is generally used, a table of specification was drawn up to state the rules and situations covered in the items. The rules governing the use of the present continuous have been described by Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1982), Quirk, Greenbaum and Svartvik (1985), Thomson and Martinet (1986), Wren and Martin (1988), and Greenbaum and Quirk (1992). They are illustrated in the following table:

Table 1
Rules governing the use of the present continuous

Rule No.	Rule	Abbreviation	Example	Item No.
1	For an action which is going on at the time of speaking.	AT	He is meeting a customer now.	1-4
2	For an action which is going on about the time of speaking or during a period in the present.	AB	I am working in K.L. these two years.	5-6
3	For a future arrangement (i.e. an action which has been arranged to take place in the future). (Note: The speaker is not referring to a series of planned future actions).	FA	He is meeting a customer tomorrow.	7-10
4	For a regular action which begins before a certain time and is happening at that time.	RB	At ten she is typing letters.	11
5	For a present annoying habit (i.e. an obstinate or annoying habit in the present).	PrAH	He is always coming late.	12
6	For an action which appears to be continuous or uninterrupted.	AC	He is always helping his classmates.	13
7	For a present gradual development (i.e. an action or event which is occurring gradually).	PrGD	House prices in this town are rising.	14
8	For an action which begins before another action after another action in dramatic narrative or vivid narrative.	DN - B	They are flying over the building when one of the engines fails.	15

The subjects were not required to state the rule but were instead expected to use their knowledge to select the grammatically correct answer from the five competing choices. This means that the subjects' knowledge was diagnosed primarily at the implicit and discriminatory levels since they were only required to distinguish the grammaticality of the verb forms given, differentiate their functions, and decide on the grammatical verb form which was most appropriate in the context implied by the words used in each item. The percentages of the subjects' choices selected by the respondents were then analysed with reference to both features and rules in the subjects' first language and target language. The researcher then assessed the subjects' knowledge of the rules mentioned above by referring to their responses to the items.

Results and discussion

Table 2 shows that the present continuous (PRC) was correctly used by most of the subjects in items 1 and 4 to refer to an action occurring ***at the time of speaking***.

Table 2
Percentages of subjects' choices for items 1-4 (AT)

Item No.	Item	Subjects' Choice	Grammaticality	Percentage of Subjects (%)
1	Fatimah _____ a dress at the moment. She makes all her clothes.	is makes	Deviant	7.8
		is making	Grammatical	60.8
		made	Deviant	4.0
		makes	Deviant	19.6
		is made	Deviant	7.8
2	You can't see Ahmad now. He _____ a bath.	has	Deviant	9.8
		have	Deviant	7.8
		are having	Deviant	9.8
		is having	Grammatical	66.7
		is have	Deviant	5.9
3	You cannot use the machine now because it _____.	is (still) repaired.	Deviant	23.5
		(till) has been repaired.	Deviant	3.9
		is (still) being repaired	Grammatical	35.3
		was (still) repaired.	Deviant	27.5

		was (still) being repaired	Deviant	9.8
4	Shafinaz usually drinks coffee but today she _____ tea.	drink	Deviant	25.5
		drinks	Deviant	45.1
		drinking	Deviant	5.9
		is drinking	Grammatical	19.6
		is drinks	Deviant	3.9

For the sentence which consisted of a temporal adverbial indicating the time of speaking or writing, such as ‘at the moment’ or ‘now’, the majority of the subjects managed to recognise that the action was occurring at the moment of speaking and that the present continuous (in its active form) should be used. The table above also shows that more than one-fifth of the subjects used the present simple (i.e. ‘is repaired’), and more than a quarter of them used the past simple (i.e. ‘was repaired’). These subjects might have realized that the PRC should be used when an action at the time of speaking was indicated through the use of the temporal adverbial ‘now’, but might not be aware of the grammatical form of the present continuous in the passive form that involves the passive auxiliary ‘is being’ and the past participle ‘repaired’.

The error rate in the use of the PRC was also higher when a temporal adverbial indicating an action occurring at the time of speaking, such as ‘now’ or ‘at the moment’, was not given in the sentence in item 3. Table 2 shows that more than two-thirds (70.6%) of the subjects used the present simple (i.e. ‘drink’ or ‘drinks’) instead of the PRC in item 4. These subjects did not seem to know that the adverb of frequency ‘usually’ was used in the first sentence to indicate a habitual action, but the temporal adverb ‘today’ was used in the second sentence to indicate an action occurring at or around the time of speaking. These results suggest that intralingual interference could have occurred as a result of the subjects’ ignorance of the rules governing the use of the PRC and the present simple (PRS).

The use of the PRC for an action occurring ***around the time of speaking*** was also identified as an area of difficulty. Table 3 shows that most (72.5%) of the subjects did not use the PRC for an action occurring around the time of speaking.

Table 3
Percentages of subjects' choices for items 5-6 (AB)

Item No.	Item	Subjects' Choice	Grammaticality	Percentage of Subjects (%)
5	Nurul's mother:	did … get on	Deviant	17.6
	How _____ Shafinaz _____ at school?	does … get on	Deviant	17.6
		was …getting on	Deviant	27.5
	Shafinaz's mother: Very well.	are … get on	Deviant	9.8
	She seems to like the life.	is … getting on	Grammatical	27.5
6	I usually go to school by car. My father takes me	works	Deviant	33.3
	because he passes my school on his way to the	is works	Deviant	2.0
	factory. But this week he _____ in another factory	worked	Deviant	7.8
	in the opposite direction. That's why I am queuing	is working	Grammatical	45.1
	at this bus station.	had worked	Deviant	11.8

In item 5, more than a quarter (27.5%) seemed unable to distinguish between the PRC (i.e. 'is getting on') and the past continuous (i.e. 'was getting on'). The high error rate supports the view that most of the subjects tended to use the PRC correctly for an action occurring at the time of speaking only when (1) the PRC was used in the active voice, and (2) temporal adverbials such as 'now' and 'at the moment' were given. In cases where these adverbials were not used, most of the subjects had difficulty choosing the correct verb to use. Such errors can be ascribed to the fact that no temporal adverbials were used to indicate whether the speaker was referring to an event occurring around the time of speaking or an event which was taking place at a definite time in the past. The subjects' tendency to use the past continuous (PAC) instead of the PRC for an action going on around the time of speaking could be partly due to their lack of awareness of the temporal references of these two verb forms.

In item 6, a third (33.3%) of the subjects used the PRS (i.e. 'works') instead of the PRC (i.e. 'is working') for an action occurring around the time of speaking. These subjects used the PRS (i.e. 'works') incorrectly to indicate an action occurring during a period of time (i.e. 'this week'). They seemed unable to differentiate between PRC and PRS, both of which are normally used to refer to actions in the present, and they appeared

unable to distinguish between (1) the use of the PRC for an action occurring around the time of speaking and (2) the use of the PRS for a habitual action which occurs in the present.

A significant portion of the subjects also combined verb forms erroneously to form the predicator of a main clause. Table 4 shows that more than half (54.9%) of the subjects combined the modal auxiliary in item 7 with the present participle 'going' in an attempt to indicate a future action.

Table 4
Percentages of subjects' choices for items 7-10 (FA)

Item No.	Item	Subjects' Choice	Grammaticality	Percentage of Subjects (%)
7	Zainab : How do you go to school usually? Shafinaz: I usually go by bus but tomorrow I _____ in Siti's car.	go	Deviant	2.0
		goes	Deviant	3.9
		will goes	Deviant	15.7
		am going	Grammatical	23.5
		will going	Deviant	54.9
8	I _____ because I am going abroad in September.	will saving up	Deviant	25.5
		had saved up	Deviant	13.7
		am saving up	Grammatical	37.3
		have save up	Deviant	19.6
		have been saved up	Deviant	3.9
9	That film _____ to the local cinema next week. Do you want to see it?	come	Deviant	3.9
		comes	Deviant	0.0
		will comes	Deviant	19.6
		is coming	Grammatical	39.2
		will be come	Deviant	37.3
10	Nasri: Why are you walking so fast today? You usually walk quite slowly. Ben : I am hurrying because I _____ my mother at 4 o'clock and she doesn't like to be kept waiting.	will meets	Deviant	68.6
		am going to meeting	Deviant	15.7
		was meeting	Deviant	2.0
		am meeting	Grammatical	5.9
		will meeting	Deviant	7.8

In this case, most (70.6%) of the subjects readily used 'will' in erroneous verbal combinations (i.e. 'will goes' and 'will going') to indicate a future event. The omission of the auxiliary 'be' as in 'will going' was a more obvious error committed by more than half (54.9%) of the subjects. As the time adverb 'tomorrow' was given in the item to indicate the temporal reference of a future event, most of the subjects encountered difficulty in the use of the PRC which is often used to indicate a ***future arrangement*** (i.e. an action which has been planned to take place in the immediate future or near future). To a large extent such errors can be ascribed to interlingual interference from the subjects' L1. A future action is normally indicated by the aspectual auxiliary '*akan*'

whose closest equivalent in the target language is 'will' or 'shall'. It should, however, be pointed out that the future auxiliary '*akan*' in Malay can also be translated as 'would' in contexts where the speaker refers to actions in the past. (See *Kamus Dwibahasa,* 2001, p. 1469 & p. 1486.) Hence, the subjects' tendency to use 'will' in erroneous combinations may be attributed to influence from the subjects' L1 which frequently requires the use of '*akan*' for future or subsequent actions.

Apart from this, the main verb 'pergi' in Malay can be translated into five verb forms (i.e. 'go', 'goes', 'went', 'gone' and 'going') of which three forms (i.e. 'go', 'goes' and 'went') can exist independently without being combined with any auxiliary. On the other hand, intralingual interference could have also occurred as these subjects did not seem to know that the PRC, which is normally used for an action occurring at the time of speaking, could also be used for a planned future action.

Table 4 illustrates that about a quarter (25.5%) of the subjects used 'will' to indicate a planned future action or future arrangement in item 8. Even though more than a third (37.3%) of the subjects used the PRC correctly to indicate a planned future action, more than two-fifths (45.1%) used erroneous verbal combinations (i.e. 'have save up' and 'will saving up') for this item. Similarly, more than half (56.9%) of the respondents chose the erroneous verbal combinations involving the use of 'will' as in 'will comes' and 'will be come' for a planned future action. These subjects' apparent inability to recognise such wrong verbal combinations supports the claim that the existence of many forms of a main verb (e.g. 'come') could be a source of intralingual interference as well. In this case the main verb may exist in many forms (i.e. 'come', 'comes', 'came' and 'coming') even though only the base form 'come' can immediately follow the future auxiliary 'will'. In item 10, these subjects had the tendency to use the auxiliary 'will' for a future arrangement. The high error rate of 94.1% also suggests that the majority of the subjects had not acquired the rule requiring the use of the PRC for a planned future action. As has been mentioned, the subjects who used the future auxiliary 'will' might be aware that a future action was referred to, but had not internalised the rule governing the combination of a future auxiliary and a main verb.

In item 11, the temporal reference involves the time of inception of an action. Table 5 shows that more than half (51.0%) did not use the PRC to refer to a ***routine action*** which ***begins before another regular action*** expressed in the PRS.

Table 5
Percentages of subjects' choices for items 11-15 (RB, PrAH, AC, PrGD, DN-B)

Item No.	Item	Subjects' Choice	Grammaticality	Percentage of Subjects (%)
11	No, I _____ badminton at 6.30. I start playing at 5.30 p.m. and stop playing at 7.00 p.m. We can probably start our discussion at 8.30 p.m. Is the time all right with you?	play	Deviant	11.8
		am playing	Grammatical	49.0
		have played	Deviant	21.6
		had played	Deviant	3.9
		plays	Deviant	13.7
12	I am very angry with you and I am not going to let you use my car any more. You _____ my car key.	loses	Deviant	7.8
		are always lose	Deviant	19.6
		are always losing	Grammatical	41.2
		are always lost	Deviant	17.6
		always losing	Deviant	13.7
13	Fatimah: Ahmad works the whole time. Siti : You are right. He _____.	is always working	Grammatical	39.2
		is always worked	Deviant	7.8
		is always works	Deviant	15.7
		is always work	Deviant	9.8
		always working	Deviant	27.5
14	It's seven o'clock. The sky _____ darker gradually.	get	Deviant	3.9
		gets	Deviant	19.6
		is getting	Grammatical	68.6
		is got	Deviant	7.8
		is get	Deviant	0.0
15	Jane: Continue to tell us the story, please. Chai Ling: Then they decide to fly over the desert to look for the boy who has got lost. When they _____over the desert, one of engines of the aircraft fails. At first they don't know what to do…	would be flying	Deviant	2.0
		flew	Deviant	13.7
		are flying	Grammatical	49.0
		were flying	Deviant	31.4
		will be flying	Deviant	3.9

About a quarter of the respondents used the PRS (i.e. ‘play’ or ‘plays’) for the regular action erroneously in this context, and more than a fifth of the subjects used the present perfect (i.e. ‘have played’) erroneously for an action that has not come to an end at 6.30 p.m. It should be pointed out that the PRC is normally not used for a regular action or event, and only the PRS is used to refer to a regular action in the present. The regular action in this case, however, should be indicated in the PRC instead of the PRS because the action does not start at 6.30 p.m. but is still going on at that time. The subjects’ inadequate understanding of the temporal reference of a verb also explains why difficulty arose in the use of the PRC. These subjects did not seem to pay much attention to the time of inception of the action. In this case the speaker regularly starts playing badminton at 5.30 p.m. and stops at 7.00 p.m., so at 6.30 p.m. she is still playing the game. The results suggest that these subjects had not acquired the rule requiring the use of the PRC for a regular action which begins before a certain time.

In item 12, more than half (58.8%) of the respondents did not use the PRC to refer to a ***present annoying habit*** even though the adverb of frequency was given. The affirmative forms of the PRC and the PRS alone include ‘lose’, ‘loses’, ‘is lost’, ‘am lost’, ‘are lost’, ‘is losing’, ‘are losing’, ‘am losing’ and other verbs which are less often used in English such as ‘is being lost’, ‘are being lost’ and ‘am being lost’. While the PRS is normally used for a present habitual action, the PRC has to be used for a present annoying habit. Hence, the incorrect use of PRS can partly be attributed to the subjects’ ignorance of the distinction between the two types of present regular actions.

In item 13, more than a fifth of the subjects used the present participle ‘working’ without the primary auxiliary ‘is’ for a ***present action*** which ***appears to be continuous***. These respondents had difficulty distinguishing a finite verb form (i.e. ‘is working’) from a non-finite one. Such difficulty can be ascribed to interference from the subjects’ L1. The affirmative form ‘*sentiasa bekerja*’ in Malay can be translated as (1) ‘always work’ or ‘always works’ to refer to a normal habitual action, and (2) ‘is always working’, ‘are always working’ or ‘am always working’ to refer to an action which appears to be

continuous. These cross-linguistic differences partly explain why interlingual interference may have occurred in the learning of verb forms in the present tense.

In item 14, more than two-thirds of the subjects used the PRC correctly for a ***gradual development*** in the present. Even though most of the subjects might be familiar with the active form of the verb (i.e. 'is getting'), nearly one-fifth of the subjects used the PRS which might refer to a sudden occurrence of an action instead of a gradual development. Such errors could be due to the subjects' ignorance of the rule requiring the use of the PRC for an action occurring gradually around the time of speaking.

The data obtained for item 15 illustrate that more than a fifth (31.4%) of the subjects used the PAC (i.e. 'were flying') instead of the PRC (i.e. 'is flying') for an action which ***starts occurring before another action in dramatic narrative***. Consider the following sentences:

(1) When they ***were flying*** over the desert, one of the engines of the aircraft ***failed***.

(2) When they ***are flying*** over the desert, one of the engines of the aircraft ***fails***.

The respondents who used the PAC (i.e. 'were flying') inconsistently with the PRS (i.e. 'fails') might be unaware of the correct sequence of tenses. Even though sentences 1 and 2 are both grammatical if they are used in storytelling, a speaker or writer has to be consistent in choosing between PRC or PAC. With regard to this, an investigation of the textbooks used by the subjects also revealed that the past tense was normally used to tell stories. The frequent use of the past tense in textbooks partly explains why a portion of the subjects seemed to use the past tense, such as the PAC (i.e. 'were flying'), readily in this case.

Conclusion and implications for strategy instruction

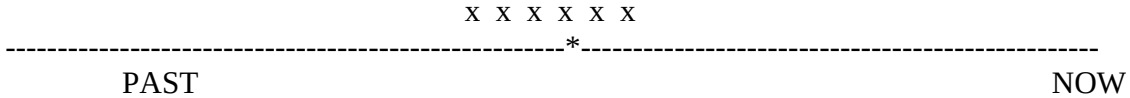
On the basis of the errors analysed in the preceding section, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the data appear to support both the hypotheses deduced above. Firstly, intralingual interference seems to be as significant as interlingual interference in the second language acquisition of the present continuous. In some cases, some subjects' inability to relate certain verb forms with temporal and frequency adverbials may be

ascribed to both interlingual and intralingual interference. In other words, interference that caused a large portion of the errors may be both intralingual and interlingual in nature. Secondly, the verb forms which may have recurrently caused confusion in the use of PRC were (1) the present simple and (2) the past continuous. The influence of the subjects' L1 on the acquisition of verb forms in the progressive aspect (in the target language) can be attributed to the fact that the PRC and the PAC are both expressed in the same grammatical form involving the use of the progressive auxiliary 'sedang' or 'masih' which shows no tense distinction (in the learners' first language).

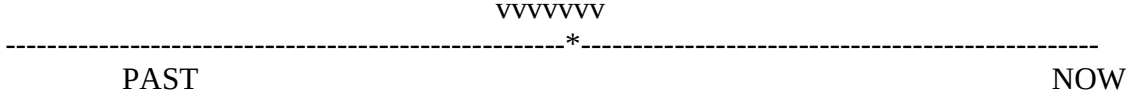
The results summarised above have some important implications for strategy instruction in the area of tense usage. First, learners need to distinguish the active forms from the passive ones even though both indicate the same tense and aspect. Cognitive strategies involving the practice of verb forms in the present continuous need to be incorporated. Such practices should involve not merely the active forms of the present continuous but also its passive forms. These forms should be contrasted simultaneously with the active and passive forms of the present simple in different situations. This means that cognitive strategies of repeated practices covering different situations, including those involving the use of adverbials indicating the time of speaking and regular events, should be taught to learners in an attempt to raise their consciousness of intralingual differences in time frames, associations with singular/plural subjects, and active/ passive structures. The point to be underscored here is that while different forms that resemble one another may be taught in stages, they need to be contrasted constantly and repeatedly in different stages in the process of acquisition.

Second, learners need to discern the differences between the present continuous and other verb forms, particularly the present simple and the past continuous, in terms of time frames. It is recommended that some memory-related strategies involving comparisons and contrasts of time lines be used to help learners recall the differences among the present continuous, the past continuous and the present simple. The following figure illustrates three time lines demonstrating the time frames using the notations 'vvvvvv' and 'xxxxxx' that indicate (1) progressive and (2) separate regular actions respectively:

(1) The use of the PRS (e.g. ‘gives’) for a present habitual action



(2) The use of the PRC (e.g. ‘is giving’) for an action occurring at the time of speaking.



(3) The use of the PAC (e.g. ‘was giving’) for an action which was occurring at a certain time in the past (i.e. which began before a definite time in the past).

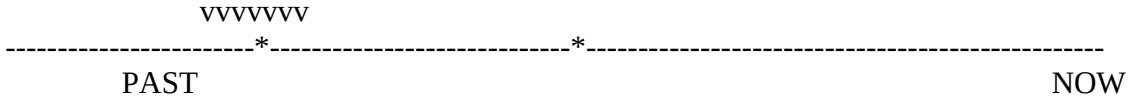


Figure 1 Suggested time lines that distinguish the three verb forms in terms of time frames

Third, learners’ confusion with combination of auxiliary and main verbs need to be sufficiently dealt with. The subjects’ tendency to use erroneous combinations of auxiliary and main verbs suggests that they might not be familiar with the rules governing the combinations of auxiliary and main verbs indicating tense and aspect. The learners’ failure to grasp the significance of modal auxiliary verb ‘will’, which should be used with a base form, seems to be the main cause resulting in the learners’ repeated use of the erroneous combinations. This means that intralingual confusion involved in the use of the verb forms can be minimised only if learners are able to comprehend the contextual information provided in the items given, or more specifically, the situations in which the grammatical form is expected to be used. This is a situation in which learners can be taught to use memory-related strategies concurrently using a five-column table that differentiates the present continuous from other verb forms as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Combinations of auxiliary verbs and transitive main verbs in the formation of the present continuous tense and the present simple tense (see Lim, 2003a, 2003b)

Table 6 Combinations of auxiliary verbs and transitive main verbs in the formation of the present continuous tense and the present simple tense (see also Lim, 2003a, 2003b)

Auxiliary Verbs	1) do/ does don't/ doesn't 2) did /didn't 3) will/ would shall/ should can/could may/ might must/ ought to has to/ have to had to/ used to, etc.	(No helping verb is required.)	(No helping verb is required.)	1) has/ have / hasn't/ haven't 2) had/ hadn't 3) (Passive voice) a) is/ am/ are b) was/ were c) will be/ would be, etc. d) has been/ have been e) had been f) is being/ am being/ are being 4) will have/ would have, etc.	1) is/ am / are 2) was/ were 3) will be/ would be, etc. 4) has been/ have been 5) had been 6) will have been/ would have been, etc. (Note: Not to be combined with stative verbs)
Column	B	1	2	3	4
Main Verb:	Base Form	Present Simple Tense	Past Simple Tense	Past Participle	Present Participle
Irregular Main Verbs	buy	buy /buys	bought	bought	buying
	do	do / does	did	done	doing
	give	give / gives	gave	given	giving
	take	take / takes	took	taken	taking
	write	write / writes	wrote	written	writing
Regular Main Verbs	clean	clean/ cleans	cleaned	cleaned	cleaning
	play	play / plays	played	played	playing
	repair	repair/ repairs	repaired	repaired	repairing
	wash	wash/ washes	washed	washed	washing
Temporal/ Frequency Adverbials	1) every day, every Sunday, etc. (Present habitual actions) 2) just now, last night, yesterday, two days ago, two weeks ago, two months ago, in 1995, when he was here etc.	every day, every Sunday, on Sundays, never, seldom, sometimes, often, usually, always, etc. (Present habitual actions)	just now, last night, yesterday, two days ago, two weeks ago, two months ago, two years ago, in 1995, when he was here, etc., every day, every Sunday etc. (Past habitual actions)	1) just, (already), etc. 2) (same as 1) 3) (Passive Voice) a) every day, etc. (Present habitual actions) b) just now, last night, etc. c) tomorrow, etc. d) just, (already), etc. e) just, (already), etc. f) now, at the moment, etc. g) at 8.30 last night, etc. 4) by 8.30 tomorrow, morning, etc.	1) now, at the moment, etc. 2) at 8.30 last night etc. 3) tomorrow etc. 4) since 1996, for two years, etc. 5) since 1996, for two years, etc. 6) by 8.30 tomorrow morning, etc.

Note: Verbs in the present continuous tense and the associated adverbials (of time and frequency) are indicated by shaded areas.

The table which separates verb forms into five columns can be used as a frame of reference that helps learners distinguish verb forms in the present continuous from those indicating another aspect and/or tense, particularly the present simple that is frequently involved in intralingual confusion. Auxiliary verbs which can be combined with each of the transitive verbs are given in the top row of the table, whereas temporal/frequency adverbials are presented in the bottom row to illustrate their frequent association with certain verb forms. After learners have familiarised themselves with combinations of a certain set of transitive main verbs with the given auxiliary verbs in the top row, they may subsequently be exposed to other main verbs that combine with the same set of auxiliary verbs and adverbials indicated in the table. This means that learners' acquisition of verb forms indicating a certain tense and/or aspect may be effectively enhanced if teachers employ memory-related strategies involving (1) the time lines explained above, (2) the list of functions of related verb forms as shown in Table 1, and (3) a five-column table that distinguishes different verb forms with reference to various combinations of verbs and possible temporal/frequency adverbials.

In brief, learners may be taught not only to constantly check the table showing the combinations of verb forms in cases of erroneous usage, but also to draw up tables showing combinations of auxiliary verbs and different regular/irregular main verbs used in various situations. This means that strategy training aimed at offsetting both types of interference should include activities that encourage learners to (1) take note of a situation in which verbs forms indicating the same tense and aspect are used, (2) compare the differences between verb forms in their first language and target language, and (3) contrast the required verb forms that resemble the PRC at the orthographic, syntactic and semantic levels.

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The Effect of the Use of L1 in a Multimedia Tutorial on Grammar Learning: An Error Analysis of Taiwanese Beginning EFL Learners' English Essays

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the CAI (computer assisted instruction) tutorial program had an impact on the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) grammar skills of the beginning EFL language learners. A quasi-experimental research design was conducted at a private college located in southern Taiwan. A post-writing assessment was administered for both the control group and the experimental group after the treatment. One hundred written essays were analyzed through error analysis and data were computed through a one-way ANOVA on overall error rates. The major finding on overall error rates demonstrates that there was no statistical difference between the control group and the experimental group. Although the supplemental CAI program in this study did not produce a statistically significant effect on reducing beginning EFL learners' overall written error rates, evidence provided by the written samples suggest that L1 played a role in the process of beginning EFL learners' writing in English. Understanding linguistic differences between students' L1 and English may help the learners reduce interference from their first language.

Key Words: L1, CAI, error analysis, EFL writing, beginning EFL grammar learning

Introduction

Writing is a complex process even in the first language. It is even more complicated to write in a foreign language. Many studies indicate that, for beginning EFL students, there tends to be interference from their first language in the process of writing in English (Benson, 2002; Cedar, 2004; Chen & Huang, 2003; Collins, 2002; Jarvis, 2000; Jiang,

1995; Lado, 1957; Liu, 1998; Mori, 1998; Yu, 1996). A better understanding of the L1 influence in the process of EFL writing will help teachers know students' difficulties in learning English. It will also aid in the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to help beginning EFL students learn English.

In addition to an awareness of the L1 influence, the use of technology is another issue that has been widely discussed in language instruction. A number of research studies confirm the advantages of integrating technology into language instruction (Cheng, 2003; Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez, 2000; Jan, 2000, 2002; Lin, 2003; Liou & Yeh, 2000; Shih & Cifuentes, 2003; Sotillo, 2000; Sun, 2000; Wei, 2002). This paper reports the results of a study examining whether grammar instruction with the addition of CAI as an instructional support tool can help beginning level Taiwanese EFL students reduce their written grammar error rates. It also discusses how L1-related errors occurred in students' written essays.

Review of Literature

The Role of L1 in EFL Writing

To investigate the relationship between students' L1 and EFL writing, Chan (2004) examined English writing samples from 710 Hong Kong ESL college students. The findings reveal that, in all of the five error types investigated, most errors were closely related to the subjects' L1. The data from interviews with the students also confirms that EFL students first called upon their L1 before producing their English writings. The use of the language transfer was even more obvious among the learners of a lower English proficiency level.

Along the same lines, Liu, Sung, and Chien (1998) also concluded that the less English proficiency learners possess, the more L1 interference was found in their English writings. In the study of Liu, et al, the authors applied a think-aloud method to detect how Taiwanese EFL students generated notes in the process of writing in English. The findings reveal that beginning EFL learners relied on their L1 to retrieve words more than advanced EFL learners.

Errors in Taiwanese EFL Learners' Writings

To understand what errors Taiwanese EFL students tend to make, investigations have been done over the years. Analyzing the errors made by Taiwanese EFL college students, Chen (1998) reported that most Taiwanese students have difficulties in the use of English tenses due to the absence of verb conjugation in Mandarin. Since Mandarin is not an inflected language, Fang (1999) highlighted the teaching of English verb tenses to prevent Taiwanese EFL students from misusing English tenses due to the linguistic difference.

Another grammatical error that is frequently found in Taiwanese EFL students' compositions is the misuse of English articles. Chen (2000) considered that English articles could be one of the most difficult grammatical parts for Taiwanese EFL students as there is not an equivalent syntactical device to the English article system. Master (1988) further indicated that beginning level EFL learners tend to be more interfered by such a linguistic difference between Mandarin and English.

Likewise, Hsin (2003) scrutinized the run-on sentences in Taiwanese EFL students' writings and identified the possible causes using contrastive analysis between English and Mandarin. The researcher observed that English is a subject-prominent language, in which a subject in a sentence is always required. In contrast to subject-oriented structures, Mandarin tends to be a topic-comment language. Such a linguistic difference between Mandarin and English creates learning difficulties for Taiwanese EFL learners and results in errors in their EFL writings.

Similarly, Li and Thompson (1981) agreed that the concept of subject in Mandarin is less significant than the concept of topic. To help Taiwanese EFL students avoid making such errors, Hsin (2003) suggested that language teachers emphasize the necessity of subjects in English sentences even if the sentence subjects are clear to speakers and listeners. Likewise, Jiang (1995) analyzed Taiwanese EFL learners' errors in English prepositions and found that a great number of errors derive from language transfer. The researcher stated that compared to English speakers, Mandarin speakers use fewer

prepositions for more concepts, therefore increasing difficulties in learning English prepositions.

In addition, some researchers employed error analysis to examine the error types in Taiwanese EFL students' English writings (Horney, 1998; Kao, 1999; Lin, 2002; Tseng, 1980; Ying, 1987). Horney (1998) investigated compositions written by 80 Taiwanese EFL students. The results revealed that errors in the use of articles had the highest error percentage (11%). Both errors in the use of prepositions and errors in the use of verbs had the same error rate 9% and were considered the second highest. By contrasting Mandarin and English, the researcher confirmed that L1 related errors were the largest portion of the total errors. Further, Lin (2002) examined 26 essays from Taiwanese EFL students at the college level. The results of this study indicated that the four highest error frequencies were sentence structures (30.43 %), wrong verb forms (21.01%), sentence fragments (15.94%), and wrong use of words (15.94%), respectively.

Also, to discover learning deficiencies in writing English, Kao (1999) scrutinized 169 compositions from 53 Taiwanese college students who were English major students. Twenty-two of them came from Soochow University and 31 were from Fu Hsing Kang College. A total of 928 errors were found, among which grammatical errors occurred with the greatest frequency, 66%, semantic errors occurred 18% of the time, and lexical errors occurred with the least frequency, 16%.

Ying (1987) examined 120 Taiwanese EFL learners' compositions and sorted errors on the basis of three criterions: overgeneralization, simplification, and language transfer. A total of 1,250 errors were detected in the 120 compositions, among which 78.9% of the errors were a result of language transfer, 13.6% were overgeneralization of the target language, and 7.5% were forms of simplification.

Computer Technology in EFL Education

The advent of technology has found a welcome home in foreign language education. Language instruction that combines technology has become popular and has had a

tremendous impact on language education. Numerous EFL research studies (Blake, 2000; Cheng, 2003; Cheng & Liou, 2000; Egbert, 2002; Higgins, 1993; Kramsch & Andersen, 1999; LeLoup & Ponterio, 2003; Skinner & Austin, 1999; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003; Willetts; 1992; Williams & Williams, 2000) suggest that integration of technology can improve academic performance, enhance motivation, and promote learning. To examine how technology supports teaching and learning, Chatel (2002) conducted interviews and observations with eight classroom teachers and four ESL teachers. One of the participants in the interview indicated that she chose appropriate software and websites, which enabled ESL learners to learn and apply English. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2003) conducted a similar research study to examine the attitude of 59 undergraduate students toward Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) software programs. The findings revealed that the students had a positive attitude toward learning language with computers.

Also, results from some research studies suggest the value of incorporating technology into EFL instruction (Carey & Gregory, 2002; Cheng, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2002; Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez, 2000; LeLoup & Ponterio, 2003). Liu, Moore, Graham, and Lee (2002) investigated the literature relating to how computer-based technology had been used in language instruction during the past decade (1990 – 2002) and found a shift in research focus. Current research, unlike that conducted in the early 1990s when the value of technology was still questioned, is now centered on how to integrate technology into language instruction to make teaching and learning more effective.

Methodology

This study was undertaken, through error analysis, to investigate the errors college level Taiwanese beginning EFL students made in their EFL writings. The researcher developed a multimedia project of grammar instruction with contrastive analysis between Mandarin (L1) and English to help the students learn English grammar. The multimedia program employed in this study was a tutorial developed using the HyperStudio computer program. It was the purpose of this study to examine whether this tutorial, with special attention to

the EFL learners' L1, has an impact on the EFL grammar skills of the beginning EFL language learners.

Research Questions

Is there a significant difference in students' written English error rates, as measured by a post-writing assessment, between those Taiwanese beginning EFL students who receive CAI instruction, with the comparison of students' L1 and English, and those who receive traditional instruction alone?

The researcher established the following null hypothesis, to examine the research question:

There is no statistically significant difference in error rates between students who receive CAI instruction as an instructional support to traditional instruction and those who receive traditional instruction alone (significance level: $\alpha = .05$)

Research Design

This study, a quasi-experimental posttest only research design, involved a control group and an experimental group, with 50 Taiwanese EFL learners in each group who had in-house TOEFL scores less than or equal to 430. The criterion of a TOEFL score of 430 is not a standard to distinguish beginning English learners but rather a way used in this study to identify beginning EFL students. Since all subjects in the two groups shared similar English proficiency levels, as defined as beginning English learners with TOEFL scores less then or equal to 430, the two groups were considered homogeneous. Both groups were administered a post-writing assessment after the treatment. The post-writing assessment involved a writing assignment of narrative essays. An error analysis of the written essays was on the basis of a predetermined set of error categories.

Participants

The target school for this study was a private medical technology college located in southern Taiwan. Although the participants in this study were not in the same department, all the subjects have the same cultural and language background, with Mandarin as their first language. All of them had received formal English education at school for about six

years. The similar English proficiency that the subjects possess makes the two groups as equivalent as possible. Of the students who participated, 29% were male and 71% were female.

The study focuses on the EFL students with in-house TOEFL scores less than or equal to 430 instead of the entire population of EFL learners because the researcher wished to examine whether learners with lower English proficiencies tend to be more interfered by L1 than advanced learners as the literature suggests (Chan, 2004; Chen, 1991; Collins, 2002; Liu, et al., 1998; Maxifield, 2002; Wang & Wen, 2002; Yao, 1991). Since more advanced EFL learners may make errors with little or no relation to L1, they were not included in the study

Contrastive Analysis

The results in Horney's (1998) study indicated that some errors made by Taiwanese students are caused by the interference from the learners' L1. Chuo (2001) agreed that the use of L1 requires language teachers to explain abstract and complicated grammar structures. To help beginning EFL learners better understand English grammar, contrastive analysis that compares the Mandarin and English languages was used in this study to facilitate grammatical explanation as well as to clarify the linguistic differences between Mandarin and English. The steps for contrastive analysis involve selection and comparability (Sridhar, 1975). Instead of overall comparison between Mandarin and English, the researcher contrasted these two languages on the core elements of speech, including verbs, nouns, articles, etc. The following are some examples of contrastive explanation.

Articles

Singular count nouns in English always follow one of the articles "*a, an, the*", while non-count nouns require the "*zero*" article or a definite article "*the*". While articles in English are strictly required, there is flexibility in Mandarin. Nouns do not follow articles but are sometimes marked through measure words that are particular words to identify units of nouns. Although nouns do not always appear together with measure words, each noun

has its own specific measure word. “Ben” in the sentence of example one, for instance, is a measure word used specifically for books. “I have a book,” in Mandarin can be written either using a measure word or not, unlike its English counterpart. Even with a plural noun, unlike “s”, “es,” or “ies” that needs to be added to the end of the noun in English, the noun in Mandarin remains unchanged.

Example 1:	English:	I	have		a	book.
	Mandarin 1:	wo	you			shu.
	Mandarin 2:	wo	you	yi	ben	shu.
				(one)	(measure word)	
Example 2:	English:	I	have			books.
	Mandarin:	wo	you			shu.

Tenses

Mandarin is not an inflected language (Fang, 1999). Verbs in Mandarin remain unchanged regardless of the tenses and aspects. Therefore, the use of tenses and aspects in English is challenging for Taiwanese EFL students.

Example 3:	I			visited	my	friend	yesterday .
	wo	zuo tian (yesterday)		bai fang	wo de	peng you.	
Example 4:	I		will	visit	my	friend	tomorrow
	wo	ming tian (tomorrow)		bai fang	wo de	peng you.	
Example 5:	I	have	had		lunch.		
	wo		chi		wu tsan	le.	
Example 6:	I	have	been		to	Japan.	
	wo		dao	guo		ji-ben.	

In examples 3 and 4, instead of conjugating verbs, time words, such as “zuo tian” (yesterday) and “ming tian” (tomorrow), are used in Mandarin to indicate the past or the future. Examples 5 and 6 illustrate the differences between Mandarin and English in the present perfect. The particle “*le*” is used in Mandarin to express the completion of actions, whereas “*guo*” is an experiential marker (Liu, 1994). While verb conjugation is not required in Mandarin, the particle “*le*” enables listeners to realize the action (having lunch) has been completed. Likewise, the experiential marker “*guo*” makes listeners understand the speaker’s experience (been to Japan).

Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA)

English verb conjugation reflects in subject-verb agreement as well, while Mandarin verbs remain unchanged regardless of person. In the examples 7 and 8 where “want” changes to “wants” in English, the Mandarin ‘xiang yao’ remains the same.

Example 7:	I	want	to	see	a	movie.
	wo	xiang yao		kan		dian ying.
Example 8:	He	wants	to	see	a	movie.
	ta	xiang yao		kan		dian ying.

Verbs

Verb construction is another area where Mandarin and English differ. In many cases, English needs infinitives to separate two or more verbs, while a series of verbs is acceptable in Mandarin.

Example 9:	want	to	see	a	movie.
	xiang yao		kan		dian ying.

Error Analysis

Participants were administered a post-writing assessment that involved a narrative essay writing assignment. An error analysis of the subjects’ written essays was employed to

examine student performance. Two raters analyzed the writing samples, using an expert validated scoring guide. The procedure of the error analysis that the researcher followed is in accordance with the following four steps (Huang, 2002):

1. Data collection
2. Identification of errors
3. Classification of errors into error types
4. A statement of error frequency

Narrative essays were the data collected in the post-writing assessment. Errors in these narrative essays were identified and classified into different error categories by two raters who were English grammar experts. Each was a native speaker of English. The researcher used their completed score sheets to calculate error rates by SPSS for data analysis. According to Huang (2002), absolute frequencies refer to the actual occurrence of errors, "usually expressed by natural numbers such as Verb errors: 838" (p. 30). The error rates in this study were obtained from dividing the absolute numbers of errors by the total words a certain group of participants had written.

A total of 15 error categories were used in this study (see Appendix), among which nine were based on Horney's (1998) study, and six were derived from the researcher's pilot study. To augment inter-rater reliability, an expert validated guide for error analysis as well as a scoring sheet were created by the researcher to provide with detailed error types and English grammatical rules for the raters to follow.

Error Analysis Training

Two raters were used to establish inter-rater reliability for the study. Each rater analyzed the collected essays from the post-writing assessment. Both raters received training from the researcher, following an expert validated guide for error analysis, and corrected 30 writing samples that served as a pilot study. The 30 writing samples were from a writing assignment of another English class at the same institution. Since the error analysis used in this study focused especially on grammatical errors regardless of writing skills, such as idea expression, organization, and cohesion, the essay scoring involved error frequency counts for grammatical errors only.

Delivery of Instruction

Instructional methods in this study involved traditional classroom instruction, referring to lectures without computer aids, and instruction with an aid of the computer tutorial. The multimedia project used in this study was created with Knowledge Adventure's HyperStudio 4.0 and was developed by the five steps of the ADDIE model: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. The treatment was administered via a computer tutorial module.

The duration of treatment in this study was four weeks, four hours a week, with a total of 16 hours of instruction for both groups. The students in the control group were taught in a traditional classroom, while those in the experimental group were instructed in a computer lab, with one computer per student. The content covers parts of speech: nouns, articles, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, coordination, and subordination. In addition to grammar explanation, exercises were provided as well. Exercises in the control group were done by paper and pencil, whereas exercises in the experimental group were practiced via the computer tutorial with immediate feedback on students' answers.

Data Collection

Both groups were administered a post-writing assessment after the treatment. Data in the form of narrative essays were collected in the post-writing assessment. In order to ensure that all writing samples collected from the subjects were non-revised first drafts, the subjects were required to write in class during one 100-minute period. Since typing speed may vary from student to student, this may have an impact on the amount of time to write. To eliminate writing anxiety as a factor in the study, hand-written drafts were required for both groups. All the writing samples were encoded with numbers instead of student names to maintain confidentiality of the participants. The following writing prompt was presented to both groups:

> Write a short essay with the topic "The Most Memorable Thing in My Life" within a period of 100 minutes. Minimum page requirement is one page. Think about an event that is most memorable or unforgettable for you. Write a story about what happened. Be sure to narrate an event and include specific details in

your response.
A narrative essay may include three main parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. Provide background information that helps your readers understand the thesis; develop more examples and details in the body paragraph; end with personal opinions or the influence the event has had on you.

Results

Inter-Rater Reliability

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to establish the inter-rater reliability through computing the correlation between Rater 1 and Rater 2. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient *r* for overall errors was .877. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed. The result $r = .877$ ($n = 100$), $p = .000$ indicates that there was a significantly positive and strong relationship between errors identified by Rater 1 and Rater 2. The Pearson correlation coefficients for individual error categories are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Inter-Rater Reliability Coefficients for Individual Error Categories (Correlation Is Significant at the 0.01 Level, Two-Tailed)

Error Categories	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (*r*)	Sig. (*p* value)
Verbs	.806	.000
Subject Omission	.805	.000
Syntax	.733	.000
Punctuation	.685	.000
Pronouns	.631	.000
Articles	.586	.000
Capitalization	.568	.000
Adjectives	.538	.000
Adverbs	.488	.000
Lexicon	.486	.000
Spelling	.467	.000
Sentence Fragment	.438	.000

Nouns	.428	.000
Conjunctions	.421	.000
Prepositions	.394	.000

The obtained Pearson correlation coefficients *r* for all the above 15 error categories were larger than zero with *p* values that equaled .000, which suggests a significantly positive relationship between Rater 1 and Rater 2, although the extent varied within different error categories. Although the values of coefficient *r* varied somewhat in individual error categories, the coefficient for overall errors was convincing.

Descriptive Statistics for Post-Writing Assessment

The writing essays obtained from the post-writing assessment were created by the 100 participants, with 50 essays from the control group and 50 essays from the experimental group. Data collected totaled 14,302 words, of which 6,600 words were from the control group and 7,702 words came from the experimental group. Total errors found were 3,345, and 3,332 by Raters 1 and 2, respectively. Errors identified by both of the two raters were considered significantly and positively related. To avoid error counts that would appear as digital numbers, the researcher did not use the average of error counts identified by the two raters, but selected one of the raters instead. Since total errors found by the two raters were quite similar and their rating was considered significantly and positively related. Choosing either Rater 1 or Rater 2 could be acceptable. Data analysis in this study was based on the errors identified by Rater 2.

While 1,518 errors were found in the control group, 1,814 errors were detected in the experimental group. Of these errors, errors in the use of verbs (5.05%), errors in punctuation (3.56%), errors in lexicon (3.10%), errors in syntax (2.36%), errors in capitalization (2.32%), errors in subject omission (1.80%), errors in prepositions (1.03%), and errors in articles (0.99%) were the eight most frequent error types (see Table 2).

Table 2 Total Errors Found in This Study

Error Category	Number of Reported Errors	Error Rate (%)
Verbs	722	5.05
Punctuation	509	3.56
Lexicon	444	3.10
Syntax	338	2.36
Capitalization	332	2.32
Subject Omission	257	1.80
Prepositions	147	1.03
Articles	141	0.99
Spelling	103	0.72
Pronouns	92	0.64
Nouns	70	0.49
Conjunctions	65	0.45
Sentence Fragments	59	0.41
Adjectives	40	0.28
Adverbs	13	0.09

Total words written by both groups equaled 14,302. Total errors equaled 3,332.

Table 3 lists error frequencies found in the control group. It is noted that the five error categories where the greatest number of errors occurred were slightly different from those showed in Table 2. While the first three most frequent errors in Table 3 were the same as those in Table 2, the control group had errors in capitalization as the fourth highest errors and syntax as the fifth highest errors.

Table 3 Error Frequencies and Error Rates for the Control Group

Error Category	Error Frequency	Error Rate (%)
Verbs	303	4.59
Punctuation	246	3.73
Lexicon	166	2.52

Capitalization	150	2.27
Syntax	135	2.05
Prepositions	100	1.52
Subject Omission	83	1.26
Articles	78	1.18
Spelling	57	0.86
Nouns	50	0.76
Pronouns	49	0.74
Conjunctions	36	0.55
Sentence Fragments	32	0.48
Adjectives	27	0.41
Adverbs	6	0.09

Total words written by the control group equaled 6,600. Total errors equaled 1,518.

Table 4 presents error occurrences for the experimental group. Like the control group, the experimental group had the same five most frequent error types as showed in Table 2 but with a slight difference in the error order. While the experimental had the second highest errors in lexicon and third highest errors in punctuation, Table 2 illustrates that the second highest errors were punctuation and the third highest errors were lexicon for the control group.

Table 4 Error Frequencies and Error Rates for the Experimental Group

Error Category	Error Frequency	Error Rate (%)
Verbs	419	5.44
Lexicon	278	3.61
Punctuation	263	3.41
Syntax	203	2.64
Capitalization	182	2.36
Subject Omission	174	2.26
Articles	63	0.82

Prepositions	47	0.61
Spelling	46	0.60
Pronouns	43	0.56
Conjunctions	29	0.38
Sentence Fragments	27	0.35
Nouns	20	0.26
Adjectives	13	0.17
Adverbs	7	0.09

Total words written by the control group equaled 7,702. Total errors equaled 1,814.

The minimum error rates and maximum error rates differ between the two groups. Although the means of the two groups were similar, the control group had a much larger range (46.35%) than that of the experimental group (28.44%). The standard deviations also account for the greater variance in error rates for the control group than the experimental group (see Table 5).

Table 5 Error Rates for the Post-Writing Assessment

Group	**N**	**Mean (%)**	**Min. Error Rate (%)**	**Max. Error Rate (%)**	**Range (%)**	**SD (%)**
Control	50	22.39	1.75	48.1	46.35	9.69
Experimental	50	23.76	9.32	37.76	28.44	7.42
All Subjects	100	23.07	1.75	48.1	46.35	8.62

The results in Table 6 display a *p* value of 0.393 which is higher than 0.05. Therefore, the research is unable to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, the results in Table 6 ($F(1, 98) = 0.736$, $p = .393$) indicate that the use of CAI instruction as an instructional support to traditional teaching in this study did not produce a significant difference in the overall error rates between the control group and the experimental group. That is, the students who received CAI instruction to support traditional instruction did not have significantly lower error rates than those who received traditional instruction alone.

Table 6 One-Way ANOVA for Overall Error Rates

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.005	1	.005	.736	.393
Within Groups	.722	98	.007		
Total	.727	99			

Significance level at $\alpha = .05$

Conclusions

The result F(1, 98) = 0.736, p = .393 derived from the one-way ANOVA (see Table 6) indicates that there was no significant difference in overall error rates between students who received CAI instruction as a supplement to traditional instruction and those who received traditional instruction, sans computer. While this result contradicts some research that supports computer-assisted instruction (Cheng, 2003; Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez, 2000; Jan, 2000, 2002; Lin, 2003; Liou & Yeh, 2000; Liu, et al. 2002; Murray, 2000; Shih & Cifuentes, 2003; Sotillo, 2000; Sun, 2000; Wei, 2002), it was consistent with Liou, Wang, and Hung-Yeh's (1992) study in which the authors implemented a multimedia project to motivate students and correct recurrent grammatical weaknesses to enhance writing instruction. The results in the study of Liou et al. showed that instruction plus computers did not positively impact achievement any more than traditional instruction. Such a non-significant phenomenon was also supported in other studies, in which the effectiveness of CAI was not found significantly better than traditional instruction (Chirstmann, Badgett, & Lucking, 1997; Fletcher-Flinn & Gravatt, 1995; Lowe, 2001; Shute & Gawlick-Grendel, 1996; Spotts, 1992; Yaakub, 1998).

While the finding of this study was in harmony with some studies that indicated the effects of computer-assisted instruction are overestimated (Iheanacho, 1997; Liou, et al., 1992; Patron, Miller, Chisamore, & Lee, 1999; Wood, 2001), Joy and Garcia (2000) contended that many non-significant difference findings resulted from uncontrolled

variables as perfect controls over all the factors that may impact a study's results were sometimes difficult in educational settings. Uncontrolled variables, such as the group size, learning styles, and learner familiarity with technology, could also have happened during this study.

As contrastive analysis between Mandarin (L1) and English was used in this multimedia project, the non-significant result may indirectly indicate that the comparison of English and the students' first language did not significantly affect the grammar learning. However, much literature supports the L1 influence on foreign language learning (Horney, 1998; Jiang, 1995; Kao, 1999; Lin, 2002; Tseng, 1980; Ying, 1987), the non-significant phenomenon may have resulted from some uncontrolled variables. The following paragraphs discuss some possible factors affecting the study's results, including (1) variance, (2) group size, (3) self-learning pace and path vs. teacher-controlled learning pace and path, (4) duration of treatment, (5) length of essays and (6) design and development of CAI.

Variance between the Two Groups

Although students in the two groups obtained similar mean error rates for the overall performance, variance existed between the two groups. While the experimental group had a slightly higher mean error rate (M = 23.76%) than the control group (M = 22.39%), the control group had a greater standard deviation in error rates (SD = 9.69) than the experimental group (SD =7.42). The variance that existed between the two groups could be a factor that impacted the study's result.

Group Size

In Liao's (2004) meta-analysis of CAI and students' achievement, the author noticed that the effect size of CAI varied with group sizes and suggested that CAI could be more effective if used in individual or small group settings. As large group instruction was involved in this study, this may have diminished the effects of CAI on learning.

Self-Learning Pace and Path vs. Teacher-Controlled Learning Pace and Path

Ehsani and Knodt (1998) declared that CAI projects promote learning as CAI provides a level of flexibility that allows students to determine their own learning pace and path. Nevertheless, since CAI was used in this study as a supplement to traditional instruction, the instructors dominated the learning schedule and learning pace. The added value of flexibility that CAI brings to learning may have been removed, or at least greatly reduced, by the use of teacher-controlled instruction in this study.

Duration of Treatment

Aside from the above factors that could possibly affect the study's results, time was a likely factor, as well. Liao (2004) pointed out that the duration of treatment was a critical variable in many of the studies examined in the meta-analysis. Rachal (1993) indicated that the design flaw of too short treatment periods could diminish the effects of CAI. The 16-hour instruction designed in this study covering eight main parts of speech as well as related exercises may not have been long enough. More time might be needed when the languages (Mandarin and English) are so dissimilar. It is possible that the treatment effects could have been increased if fewer parts of speech were covered. Further research is recommended.

Length of Essays

One of the critical uncontrolled variables that may affect results was the length of essays. Kwok (1998) declared that more errors could be detected in longer essays. The experimental group had more words than the control group (7,702 words vs. 6,600 words) and more errors were found in the experimental group as well (1,814 errors vs. 1,518 errors or an error rate of 23.76% vs. 22.39%).

Design and Development of CAI

The design and development of CAI could also be another factor that impacted the results. Although materials used in the HyperStudio tutorial were agreed by Subject Matter Experts, the CAI tutorial was not created by professional computer programming teams but by the researcher instead. The researcher's inferior computer programming

knowledge compared to professional software programmers might have reduced the quality of the learning tutorial.

Although the study obtained a non-significant result, such a result may have been under the impact of some uncontrolled variables as discussed previously. Therefore, the researcher could not assert the use of L1 in CAI grammar instruction did not benefit grammar learning. More research is needed to examine this result.

Other Findings

Although the use of L1 in CAI grammar instruction did not yield a significant effect on grammar learning, it is noted that many grammar errors were originated from L1 interference. Some findings worthy of discussion are the most frequent error types the subjects made. While overall error rates helped the researcher understand the students' overall performance, specifying the frequent errors the participants made clarified what the students' learning difficulties were (Chen, 1999). The eight categories where the greatest number of errors occurred in this study were: Verbs, Punctuation, Lexicon, Syntax, Capitalization, Subject Omission, Prepositions, and Articles (see Figure 1). The subjects' writings in this study may have been related to the language structures of the subjects' first language, Mandarin. For example, several English writing samples were found with direct translation from Mandarin sentences, as all the Mandarin sentences were followed by Mandarin-structured English sentences. This finding is in line with some research that confirmed the interference from L1 in the process of EFL writing (Chan, 2004; Collins, 2002; Liou, et al, 1992; Liu, et al, 1998; Wang & Wen, 2002; Yao, 1991; Ying, 1987). The following paragraphs discuss how and why the errors were formed.

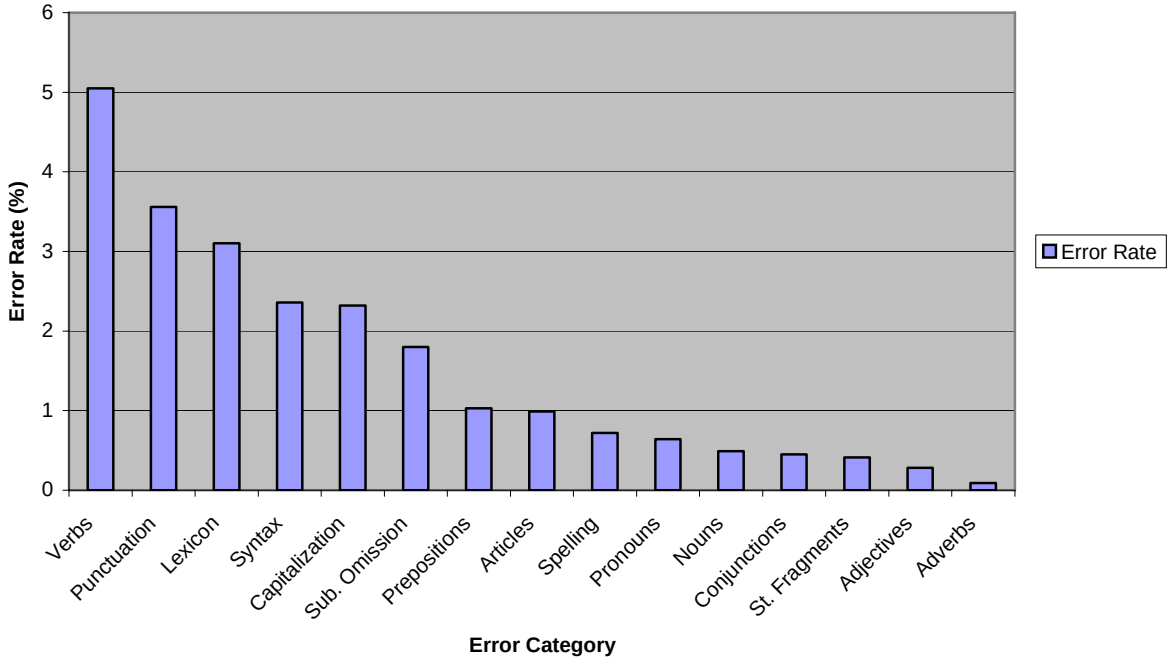

Figure 1 Error distribution in order for this study

The highest error rates in this study occurred within the error category of verbs, with 722 errors, an error rate of 5.05% (see Figure 1 and Table 2). This finding may explain that the use of English verbs was a major learning difficulty for all the subjects. Some errors in tenses and subject-verb agreement were found because the students forgot to conjugate verbs. The following are examples:

She say….(Paper 3)

The doctor say….(Paper 12)

One day…I meet a cute dog (Paper 9).

I'm six years old at that time (Paper 13).

This finding echoes Chen's (1998) assertion that most Taiwanese EFL students have difficulties in the use of English verbs due to the absence of verb conjugation in Mandarin.

Punctuation is the second highest error category in this study, with a total of 509 errors or an error rate of 3.56%. The misuse of commas was prevalent in this study. Unlike sentences in English ending in periods, commas in Mandarin can be used to

separate long sentences and are the most frequently used punctuation. The following are illustrative of this point:

> Last summer, I went to swimming, remember I just no swimming, because, I aunt teach my swimming, just begin (Paper 1).
>
> …father and mother belt me go to a restaurants the night, we drop food very much, for instance…., the end, waiter to take a cake to appear, I'm surprised very much, my mood is happy very much…(Paper 97).

While high error incidences in punctuation were noticed in this study, this finding is contradictory to Ying's (1987) study. Ying specified various types of errors commonly made by Taiwanese EFL learners, yet errors in punctuation were not included. An explanation for this could be that errors in Punctuation were not considered, in Ying's study, as grammatical errors as other primary grammatical errors that typically refer to the parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns, articles, etc. Nevertheless, there is no denying that many run-on sentences could result from the misuse of commas.

Lexicon or word choice is the third highest error category in this study, with 444 errors or an error rate of 3.1%. Correct word choice is based on a better understanding of the target language and culture. However, due to the difference in cultures and lexicon between Mandarin and English, some words used in the participants' papers were non-native-like or misused. The inappropriate use of synonyms was a factor that caused errors in Lexicon. For example:

> The summer trip is my most memorable thing….I often ….feel happy and warm and fragrant (Paper 11).
>
> Every body ate very full (Paper 12).
>
> I don't watch the car in that time (Paper 13).

The incorrect word choice could be due to the lack of consideration of the context in which a word is used. The more learners understand the lexicon, the more appropriately they use vocabulary. This result is consistent with Lin's (2002) study, in which Lin

examined 26 essays from Taiwanese EFL college students and concluded that the wrong use of words was one of the four most frequent error types.

Syntactical errors, the fourth highest error occurrence in the participants' papers of this study (338 errors or an error rate of 2.36%), were primarily based on the inappropriate transfer of L1 syntax or word order. The following are examples:

…I didn't hard learn…(Paper 46)

…the entire strip pants all are the soil… (Paper 60)

…previous time discussed finally us to decide rode the train… (Paper 27).

I with my father, mother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, cousin go to Japan (Paper 10).

This finding coincided with the conclusion of Lin's (2002) study that Taiwanese EFL college students tend to replace English vocabulary with Mandarin, thereby making errors in word order. The finding was also consistent with Yao's (1991) and Andre and Su's (1996) studies in which the authors claimed that Chinese-structured English sentences became the hallmark of L1 transference, resulting in non-native-like sentences.

The fifth highest error incidence of this study, errors in capitalization, occurred 332 times, at an error rate of 2.32%. While capitalization errors were not considered as frequent errors in other research, such as Lin's (2002) and Kao's (1999) studies, errors in capitalization were prevalent in the current study. In addition to capitalization for proper nouns, the primary capitalization errors found in this study were that the participants forgot to capitalize the first letter of a sentence. For example:

Then my sweet and I went to see a movie. he gave me a birthday present (Paper 26).

And I called it. it knows me too! (Paper 18)

We were went to many places including Xiamen's most famous park and paino island (paper 23).

As proposed by Hsin (2003) and Li and Thompson (1981), Mandarin tends to be a topic-comment language, unlike English that is a subject-prominent language in which a subject in a sentence is always required. Confirming Hsin's and Li and Thompson's

comments, subject omission is a prevalent error type in this study, occurring 257 times with an error rate of 1.8%. It appears that the participants may have been affected by their first language and would sometimes make English sentences without subjects. The following are illustrative of this point:

Remember in my 15 year old birthday... (Paper 19)

Remember eight years ago…(Paper 24)

…when you sit up, will not fear very much… (Paper 34)

He is always to say he forget to prepare the gift with me. Till evening. Say his ring drops in the sand heap with me. Call me help to find (Paper 76).

Consistent with Jiang's (1995) finding that a great number of errors in prepositions made by Taiwanese EFL students derive from language transfer, the errors in prepositions in this study occurred with a high frequency, 147 errors or an error rate of 1.03%. The errors involved omitting prepositions, using wrong prepositions, or adding unnecessary prepositions. The following are examples:

At last, we went the night market… (Paper 85)

I can't forget to forever (Paper 100).

….scattering in the floor… (Paper 61)

At one day …. (Paper 33)

While Horney's (1998) study indicated that errors in the use of articles were found to have the highest error rate, errors in the use of articles in this study had the 8th highest error incidence, with 141 errors or a 0.99% occurrence. Articles in English are strictly required, whereas there is flexibility in Mandarin. It is possible that participants may have forgotten sometimes to use articles due to the interference from their first language. For example:

Previous month… (paper 38)

….take tent … (Paper 61)

…while hearing what person say… (Paper 74)

…first time…(Paper 19)

Recommendations for EFL Educators

Grammatical proficiency is the foundation of better writing ability. Efficient grammar instruction, especially for adult learners, helps EFL students learn English more effectively (Bley-Vronman, 1989; Valette, 1991; ZhongganGao, 2001). Therefore, understanding students' learning difficulties and providing appropriate grammar instruction is the key to effective teaching for EFL teachers.

Language Comparison to Clarify Learning Difficulties

English writing for many Taiwanese beginning EFL students is a process of translation (Lin, 2002), which is confirmed by the current study as well. This study indicates various errors the students made and ranked the most frequent error categories, which can be an indication for Taiwanese EFL teachers to better understand what errors their students could make and provide instruction thereby. Many errors found in this study were considered L1-related. It is apparent that L1 plays an important role in the process of writing in English. The participants of this study were adult students who are all eligible to express their ideas in a clear way. However, language transfer caused problems for them and made the English writing process even more complicated.

Clarifying learning difficulties can be the first step that helps beginning EFL students master English grammar. Language interference is apparently a common problem for beginning EFL learners. English teachers can help beginning EFL students reduce language interference by specifying the differences between Mandarin (L1) and English, in order to make English grammar instruction more effective. Errors in the use of verbs in this study, for example, were ranked as the number one error category where the greatest number of errors occurred. Such errors should be given attention by EFL educators. In addition to explaining grammatical rules of English verbs, EFL teachers may also compare the verb differences including tense concepts between Mandarin and English.

EFL students with different English proficiencies may have different learning difficulties. While more advanced learners may have more errors not related to language transfer, L1-related errors are prevalent for beginning learners. English grammar

instruction with the comparison of Mandarin and English can be a good option for EFL instructors, especially those who speak Mandarin or are native speakers of Mandarin.

Language Transfer Problems between Mandarin and English

The researcher identified eight error categories where the greatest number occurred: (1) verbs, (2) punctuation, (3) lexicon, (4) syntax, (5) capitalization, (6) subject omission, (7) prepositions, and (8) articles (see Figure 1). Language transfer problems in terms of these errors may benefit EFL educators' grammar instruction especially when comparing the two languages. The very different grammatical structures between Mandarin and English make it more difficult for beginning EFL students to learn English, yet such distinct differences could also make it easier for educators to compare the two languages when instructing English grammar.

Incorporation of Technology in EFL Education

Aside from the comparison of English and Mandarin that may facilitate students' learning of English grammar, the incorporation of technology in EFL education motivates students to learn a new language (Blake, 2000; Cheng, 2003; Egbert, 2002; LeLoup & Ponterio, 2003; Skinner & Austin, 1999; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003; Williams & Williams, 2000). Although this study does not demonstrate that CAI produced a significant effect on reducing students' overall written error rates, no evidence was found in this study suggesting that CAI as an aid of instruction is detrimental. The CAI instructional aid was not proven to be superior to the traditional instruction in this study, yet it may be at least as good as traditional instruction.

The HyperStudio tutorial used in this study contains the core elements of the parts of speech: nouns, articles, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions. Teachers may focus on only one or two parts at a time and evaluate performance with an objective test that is well designed to cover all the learning content and an error analysis of learners' written essays before moving on to the next part of speech. Language learning anxiety, especially written assignments, should be diminished as much as possible, which may be done through allowing sufficient time for essay

development as well as providing more examples and exercises. Remedial instruction should be provided for the content that students do not master.

For adult learners, learning a foreign language is a complex process. The confusion of language transfer is more common for beginning EFL learners. Beginning English learners will be benefited if provided with systematic and well-designed grammar instruction in connection with their first language, through which language differences were indicated. Employing technology to facilitate language instruction to bring about greater learning is a new responsibility of educators in today's technological age.

Appendix: Error Categories Used in This Study

- Errors in the use of nouns
    - Singular/Plural
- Errors in the use of articles
- Errors in the use of pronouns
    - Incorrect case forms
    - Missing possessives
- Errors in the use of verbs
    - Tense
    - Subject-verb agreement
    - Auxiliary
    - Verb omitted
- Errors in the use of prepositions
    - Prepositions omitted
    - Wrong prepositions
    - Unnecessary prepositions
- Errors in the use of adjectives
    - Wrong form (confusion of adjectives and adverbs)
    - Comparative/Superlative forms
- Errors in the use of adverbs
    - Wrong form (confusion of adjectives and adverbs)
    - Comparative/Superlative forms
- Errors in the use of conjunction
    - Coordination
    - Subordination (adverbial clauses, relative clauses, and nominal clauses)
    - Missing conjunctions
- Errors in sentence fragments
    - Incomplete sentences
- Errors in Syntax
    - Word order (incorrect sentence structures)

- Errors in Lexicon
    - Word choice
- Errors in Punctuation
- Errors in Spelling
    - Misspelling
- Errors in Capitalization
- Errors in Subject Omission

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On the Teaching and Learning of L_2 Sociolinguistic Competence in Classroom Settings

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Bio Data

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Abstract

It is well-recognized that in acquiring a new language, second language (L_2) learners, in addition to learning structural, functional, and discoursal rules, have to internalize sociolinguistic rules that can guide them in the choice of appropriate forms. Research has amply shown that even advanced learners' communicative behavior, due to a lack of sociolinguistic competence, may often deviate from L_2 conventions so as to cause many cross-cultural misunderstandings. The study reported in this paper was an investigation of classroom practice and its effects on the learner's development of sociolinguistic competence. The purpose is to examine and discuss, based on the data obtained from classroom observation, what foreign language teachers may need to pay close attention to when teaching a foreign language.

Key Words: sociolinguistic competence, communicative competence, classroom observation, communicative language teaching

Introduction

The second language (L_2) teaching profession has long been involved in a search for methods that would not only be generalizable across widely varying audiences, but also could successfully be used to teach a foreign language to students in the classroom. To meet the demands of the diversity of language learners in multiple worldwide contexts, researchers and practitioners have gradually learned from a long search to realize that "there never was and probably never will be a method" (Nunan, 1991, p. 228) for all learners, and thus come up with a cautiously eclectic, integrated approach aiming to help teachers make enlightened choices of classroom tasks and activities that are solidly grounded in the valuable findings from research on L_2 learning and teaching (Brown, 2001).

Nowadays Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become a well-recognized approach in this profession. The CLT approach centers on the widely-discussed notion of communicative competence, and it has been well recognized nowadays that foreign language learners cannot really learn the target language well without paying close attention to this aspect of competence. Take college students in Taiwan for example. They have often been criticized that their communicative competence in English is substantially limited, for having learned English for at least 6 years (3 years at junior and 3 years at senior high school) before attending college, the majority of these EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners still show many difficulties employing this language to freely express themselves in everyday situations or even conduct a simple conversation with native English speakers. It has been suggested that the poor performance is closely related to the fact that the English testing practice most Taiwanese junior and senior high school students are faced with is firmly rooted in discrete, routinized skill goals heavily based on the outdated Grammar Translation Method and/or Audiolingual Method, rather than in communicative objectives based on CLT. To complicate matters, the high school curriculum, unfortunately, is intimately linked to such practice because the school's ratings and the teacher's reputation lie mostly in students' performance on entrance-related examinations for entering good senior high schools and colleges (Yu, 2003). Gladly, efforts have been made to address this problem in college English teaching programs, most of which are now purported to be anchored in the principles of the CLT approach. The study reported in the present paper was an investigation of such classroom practice and its effects on the learner's development of L_2 sociolinguistic competence. The purpose is to examine and discuss, based on the data obtained from classroom observation, what foreign language teachers may need to pay close attention to when teaching this indispensable competence.

Background

In 1972, Hymes, in reaction to the Chomskyan dichotomy of *competence* (i.e., knowledge of a language) and *performance* (i.e., actual use of a language), pointed out forcefully the notion of communicative competence, arguing that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (p. 278). Ever since, L_2 teaching has gradually

shifted its focus from linguistic forms to actual language use, and this kind of competence has been claimed to represent "a concept that attracts researchers and curriculum developers" and provide "a sturdy framework for integrating linguistic theory, research, and teaching practice" (Savignon, 1991, p. 263).

Accordingly, a major change over the past three decades in L_2 instruction can be observed in the shift from an explicit emphasis on language itself, i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and phonology, etc., to an enthusiastic focus on the expression and comprehension of meaning through language use. Today the term CLT is considered representing a currently well-recognized approach that is generally accepted as a norm in L_2 learning and teaching. As Brown (2001, p. 46) nicely and humorously put it, CLT, along with a number of concepts closely allied to it such as "learner-centered," "whole language based," "content-centered," and "cooperative," has become such a bandwagon term that without the endorsement of it "teachers cannot be decent human beings and textbooks cannot sell." Compared to approaches that are primarily or even exclusively form-focused and metalinguistic in orientation, the new approach, designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, functional, authentic use of the target language for meaningful purposes, indeed does a better job of leading to higher levels of fluency and communicative confidence in the L_2 (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

According to Canale and Swain's (1980) and later Canale's (1983) classic definition, communicative competence consists of four indispensable components: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences. Simply put, grammatical competence deals with sentence-level rules only, discourse competence with rules that govern the relationship among sentences to form a meaning whole, sociolinguistic competence with rules of speaking that depend on pragmatic, sociocultural elements, and strategic competence with the way the speaker manipulates language to fulfill communicative goals. If the foreign language course aims to enable learners to reach a level of communicative competence, all four components are of great importance.

The present paper focuses on sociolinguistic competence because it seems to be the most neglected aspect among the four categories of communicative competence in foreign language curriculum. The 'de-emphasized' status of this competence in educational practice has to do with the fact that it is closely related to the sociocultural part of acquiring a second language. This type of competence in effect "requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Only in a full context of this kind can judgments be made on the appropriateness of a particular utterance" (Savignon, 1983, p. 37). However, although the teaching of socio-cultural understanding seems so critical for appropriate use of language that no one would deny the need for and importance of having this component integrated with required L_2 study, we can easily observe a number of reasons why many language courses today yet do not include socio-cultural materials. For example, Omaggio (2001) summarizes three main reasons why such understanding is often not treated both as a topic in its own right and as an indispensable aspect of language teaching: a) Language teachers often think that they do not have time for sociocultural teaching in an already time-limited curriculum. Sometimes teachers even think that after students master the basic skills, they will naturally be exposed to sociocultural materials. b) Teachers may not have enough confidence in believing that they can teach sociocultural aspect of foreign language learning well. c) The teaching of sociocultural competence often involves dealing with student attitudes; it thus is a sort of hazy, threatening, and unquantifiable area that teachers usually find very challenging when trying to guide their students to understand and appreciate the logic and meaning of the target culture. Consequently, it appears to be no surprise that sociolinguistic competence is often neglected in educational practice.

Notwithstanding the seemingly adverse status of this competence, it is now an undeniable truth that when acquiring a new language, L_2 learners, in addition to learning structural, discoursal, and strategic rules to meet the needs of linguistic accuracy and fluency, have to internalize sociolinguistic rules that can assist them in the choice of appropriate forms. Perhaps the fascination that the development of sociolinguistic competence holds for L_2 researchers originates from the serious trouble to which the lack

of this awareness may lead for learners. Often, mastery of linguistic forms combined with sociolinguistic confusion can make learners seem so improper as to cause misunderstandings or even offense when they can understand only the literal meaning of the words but do not know the sociolinguistic rules of use for interpreting those words. No wonder even advanced learners' communicative behavior would often deviate from L_2 conventions so as to cause many cross-cultural misunderstandings. It therefore goes without saying that the teaching of sociolinguistic competence can never be treated lightly if foreign language teachers intend to assist learners not only in employing grammatically correct forms but also in knowing when to use these forms and under what circumstances.

Specifically, sociolinguistic competence can be generally divided into two areas. One is appropriateness of form, that is, pragmalinguistics, which signals "the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" (Leech, 1983, p. 11); the other is appropriateness of meaning, that is, sociopragmatics, which defines the ways in which pragmatic performance is subject to specific sociocultural conventions and values (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). For nonnative speakers, the misunderstandings they are often faced with in the cross-cultural realization of communicative acts usually arise from their failure in appropriate use of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence.

Given that the learning of sociolinguistic competence is highly related to the appropriateness of behavior conditioned by the target cultural conventions, Chinese EFL learners are worth studying because it has been suggested that their culture of learning may put some serious constraints on the adoption of the CLT approach in Chinese language classrooms (Hu, 2002). Chinese culture of learning refers to the fact that much behavior in the language classroom "is set within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, p. 169). Influences on language teaching from such a culture lay

special emphasis on “memorization” and “understanding and analytical ability” (Connell, 1987, p. 203) in classrooms, where the teacher is usually respected as the source of knowledge, and much time is spent on explication of the structure of language and the usage of words (Gao, 2005). It thus has been argued that CLT and the Chinese culture of learning are in conflict in several important respects (Hu, 2002), and students may thus perceive the teaching method employed by their instructors as unsuitable to their needs (Grabe & Mahon, 1981; Yu, 1984; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Wan, 1997). It then would be of great interest to observe teachers/students interaction in CLT-based classrooms. No empirical studies thus far have specifically examined, through classroom observation, how sociolinguistic competence is taught in the L_2 programs that are based on the CLT approach *for* Chinese EFL learners in Taiwan. This study, hence, aims to extend the scope of EFL research by investigating the teaching of sociolinguistic competence for Chinese EFL learners in Taiwan, who have been often considered to have a rather poor performance in this area of competence, and the findings may contribute to a better understanding of how EFL learners can be assisted in improving their sociolinguistic competence.

Classroom Observation

Research Questions

Given the great importance of sociolinguistic competence argued above, the investigator undertook a detailed examination of the amount and type of sociolinguistic competence provided in four college English classes in Taiwan. The specific questions asked during the classroom observation period were (a) how different foreign language teachers interpreted the component of sociolinguistic competence in terms of their classroom practice, and (b) whether classroom practices had any effect on learners’ development of sociolinguistic competence.

Participants

The participants who took part in this study were 112 first-year college students from four intermediate-level, compulsory English classes studying in Taiwan. These students were required to take the EFL course two hours a week. The classes were selected

through a student questionnaire asking about their background information and a teacher questionnaire focusing on communicative orientation of L_2 classroom interaction. There were two main reasons why these classes were chosen. First of all, the instructors were all strongly purported to represent CLT orientation to instruction; it thus seemed easy for the observer to find them paying attention to this aspect of communicative competence in teaching. Second, the students in these four classes were mostly similar in age, parental education, urban or suburban residence, and representation of men and women. So the chance of attributing detected differences to variables other than those being studied could be greatly reduced. Nevertheless, because the participants were not randomly selected, no claim is here made that the classes chosen constituted a representative sample of all college English classes in Taiwan.

Instruments

All the students taking part in the experiment were given a pre-experiment and post-experiment, teacher-designed sociolinguistic test. This test was a 25-item multiple-choice test devised to measure degrees of politeness, formality, appropriateness, and register variation in the spoken mode. For each item, a sociocultural context was provided, and the participants needed to choose from a list of four alternatives the most appropriate way to respond to that particular situation. The scoring for this test was based on native-speaker responses to the items. A sample question is as follows:

> You are having dinner with your friend's family. The food that your friend's mother has prepared is delicious, and you want some more. You've decided to say something in order to get some more. Which of the following, do you think, is the most appropriate?
> "You are a great cook."
> "Please give me more food."
> "This food sure is delicious."
> "Could I have some more?"

Furthermore, to determine how sociolinguistic competence was taught in different classrooms and to compare how different these language classrooms were, the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) scheme (Allen, Fröhlich, & Spada, 1984) was employed because it has been one of the most sophisticated observation schemes that have been developed so far (Nunan, 1992) and, more

importantly, because the investigator could match the scheme to the purpose of the present research. To best answer the research questions, a modified version of this scheme was utilized in this study to document the observed classroom interactions and behaviors in terms of the communicative orientation and degree of L_2 sociolinguistic instruction. Specifically, whether a cluster of predetermined features and categories on the scheme can be observed is a key to judging the degree of communicative orientation and sociolinguistic instruction of a given class.

The COLT scheme consists of two parts. Part A, usually referred to as the macrolevel analysis, is designed to conduct a real-time coding that describes classroom activities at five major levels. The first, *activity type*, such as drill or role play, etc., is employed to help the observer identify the kinds of tasks and exercises that students need to do in classroom. Compared to the other levels, it not only is qualitative as opposed to quantitative in nature, but is the only open-ended category, within the context of which, the information of classroom processes realized by the other levels are provided. The second level, *participant organization*, such as teacher-centered activities like whole-class interaction or student-centered activities like group work, records the amount of time spent on different types of class interaction. The third level, *content*, can be employed to determine whether an observed class is primarily code-based or meaning-based in its orientation. Code-based instruction is realized through a subcategory, explicit focus on language (form, function, discourse, and sociolinguistic rules), whereas meaning-based orientation is realized through the subcategory of 'other topics.' The fourth level, *student modality*, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, or writing, measures how much time students spend practicing the four skills. The last level, *materials*, focuses on information regarding type, length, and source of texts being used. In a word, the Part A analysis permitted a description of classroom practices for different focuses of communicative competence within activities. For example, if an activity was described as sociolinguistics-focused, the features of instruction were specified.

In addition, a modified section of Part B, generally referred to as microlevel analysis, was used to conduct a post hoc analysis of classroom language at the level of verbal

interaction. To code both teacher and student talk during classroom activities, the scheme focused on the extent to which: a) the target language is used (use of target language), b) the information exchanged or requested is unpredictable (information gap), c) speakers engage in extended discourse (sustained speech), d) speakers pay attention to a correction of the linguistic form of an utterance (reaction to message or code), e) speakers incorporate preceding utterances (incorporation of preceding utterances), f) speakers spontaneously initiate talk (discourse initiation), and g) classroom talk is unrestricted use of language such as free conversation or oral reports (relative restriction of linguistic form) - the last two of which were exclusively used for coding student talk (Allen, Fröhlich, and Spada, 1984, pp. 240-243). In brief, Part B analysis permitted an investigation of the verbal interaction of teacher and student talk to probe how communicative competence was taught and learned in class (see Allen, Fröhlich, & Spada, 1984; Fröhlich, Spada, & Allen, 1985; Spada, 1984, 1987, 1990 for details regarding the coding procedures for the COLT and the rationale and definition for the inclusion of different categories of Parts A and B).

Procedures

Each of the four classes was observed for two hours every week, over a four-month period in 2005 (approximately 32 hours per class). All classes were audio- and videotaped. As suggested above, following Fröhlich, Spada, and Allen's (1985) classic study, all the coding in Part A was done real time initially during the observation period and Part B was done post hoc after the observation, and then both types of coding were further refined based on the cassette and videotape recording of the observed classes.

Reliability of Coding

The coding for each observed class was carried out independently. The coders were required to check their entries for Part A immediately after each observation session and their entries for Part B after each minute of coding. In addition, in order to achieve interrater reliability, 20% of the data for Part A and Part B was randomly selected to be independently coded by a second rater (Cohen, 1960). This second rater relied on tape-recorded data to do the coding. A corrected-for-chance level of kappa of at least .85 was

considered acceptable in the present study. The interrater agreement coefficients were 87% and 91% for the Part A and the Part B data, respectively.

Data Analysis

As aforementioned, a revised version of the COLT scheme was adopted in the present study. Where the various features in Part A were concerned, only the subcategory 'explicit focus on language' in the *content* parameter was examined closely in the present study because the focal point of this paper was on sociolinguistic instruction—an often-neglected subcomponent of communicative competence, while the COLT was originally designed to measure the overall degree of communicative orientation. Other features in Part A served as an ancillary tool to help illustrate class differences when differences in sociolinguistic instruction were observed and discussed. This way, it may be likely for the researcher to present a fuller picture of how the observed classes were instructed in this aspect of competence.

To investigate whether there were differences in the kinds of sociolinguistic instruction that L_2 learners were receiving, the observation data from the 'explicit focus on language' category were analyzed using descriptive statistics to present the percentage of the amount of time each class spent on developing learners' sociolinguistic competence. The investigator would then further compare the quantitative data in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to see whether there were any significant differences in instruction among the four observed classes. For the microlevel analysis of Part B data, the analysis aimed to provide some descriptive information to see whether there were differences in classroom language geared toward sociolinguistic competence among the observed classes.

To determine whether the observed differences in instruction might contribute to variation in learners' learning outcomes, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to compare the post-test means among the four classes under investigation. The rationale for employing ANCOVA was that we could statistically control any initial differences in the participants' pre-test scores that might have confounded differences in

the post-test performance among the groups. The mean scores of each post-test proficiency test were examined separately to reveal whether learners in one class improved more than their counterparts in the others (Spada, 1987).

Results and Discussion

The first question asked during the classroom observation period was whether different language teachers would differ in their teaching of sociolinguistic competence. While the overall observation based on the analyses of the various features in Part A showed that all four classes, as purported, were indeed communicative in their approach most of the time, these four classes could be roughly divided into two types. They can be seen as respectively representative of what Johnson (1982) has referred to as the 'separationist' and the 'unificationist' positions in interpreting communicative language teaching. The instructors in classes A and B appeared to be a 'pro-separationist,' for they tended to focus mainly on functional practice, with little explicit teaching in the formal features of language. In contrast, the instructors in classes C and D seemed to be a 'pro-unificationist' because they, although still anchoring their teaching primarily in a CLT approach, believed in the efficacy of form-based instruction, especially in an EFL environment, and thus often added some flavor of formal features in their classes. The difference in the ways in which these two groups of instructors interpret CLT could serve as a contrast in the present study to explore whether there were instructional differences in teaching sociolinguistic competence between them and whether these differences would contribute to variation in learners' performance.

A qualitative analysis based on the first category - *activity type* - in Part A of the COLT scheme revealed that teaching differences in sociolinguistic instruction seemed to exist between these two types of classes. As noted above, the purpose of this analysis was to examine whether there were any differences in the kinds of classroom activities and in the way in which these activities were carried out when sociolinguistic instruction was observed. The results indicated that in 'pro-separationist' classes A and B, sociolinguistic instruction was observed in authentic activities, which referred to classroom tasks simulating real-life communicative situations such as listening to English radio programs,

whereas for ‘pro-unificationist’ classes C and D, sociolinguistic instruction was found in activities which reflected traditional pedagogic practices such as transformation drills or multiple-slot substitution drills.

While the observed instructors were found to interpret CLT differently and engage in different types of activities in which sociolinguistic instruction was observed, they all devoted very little time to activities oriented to a better understanding of sociolinguistic competence. The percentage of the total observed class time on sociolinguistic instruction was 4%, 3%, 5%, and 2% for classes A, B, C, and D, respectively. The ANOVA finding indicated that this difference was not significant ($F = .39$, $p < .7575$, ns). We thus know that these language teachers did not differ significantly in their instruction of sociolinguistic competence.

In addition, the analysis of classroom language based on part B indicated that the very few sociolinguistics-focused behaviors of the observed teachers were always reactions to students’ performance or to learner requests for commenting on their language use. In other words, teachers never specifically took the initiative in presenting sociolinguistic rules to help their students learn how to use the target language appropriately. Therefore, the sociolinguistic information exchanged or requested in classroom was basically predictable, and teachers only paid attention to the correction of learners’ incorrect use of sociolinguistic forms, rather than creating opportunities for their students to incorporate preceding utterances or engage in extended discourse for a better sociolinguistic understanding.

Accordingly, the answer to the first research question appears to be that while the observed instructors differed in the classroom activities in which sociolinguistic instruction was observed, they did not differ in the class time spent on teaching sociolinguistic competence and in the classroom language used to improve this competence.

Furthermore, in order to investigate the second question, i.e., whether classroom practices had any effects on learners' development of sociolinguistic competence, the test scores from the post-treatment multiple-choice sociolinguistic tests were compared through ANCOVA and found not significantly different between one another (F = .33, p = .8036, ns). Given that very little time had been spent in helping learners develop sociolinguistic competence, this result could actually be expected.

The finding of the present study clearly showed that very little attention had been paid to the teaching of sociolinguistic competence in the four classes observed; it thus came as no surprise that students' competence in this category of communicative competence did not show any differences. In fact, students in the four classes all performed very poorly on the sociolinguistic pre- and post-test and separate t-test analyses of pre- and post-test scores indicated that students in each class did not improve significantly over the 4-month session (t = -.63, .11, -.87, -.74, ns for classes A, B, C, and D, respectively). Because, as mentioned earlier, sociolinguistic competence is closely related to the sociocultural side of language learning, the current finding in fact lends support to Omaggio's (2001) argument that the teaching of culture, even though having been advocated for many years by foreign language experts, remains insubstantial and sporadic in most L_2 classrooms, and, therefore, is one of the most often neglected aspects in foreign language curriculum.

It is important to note here that the present study, which was based on classroom observation to collect data, is in essence a post hoc description of some particular classroom events and outcomes. It, therefore, can only be taken as suggestive of directions for future studies. In addition, this kind of data is generally considered limited, and we cannot simply assume that the instructional method is the only variable that is related to the observed outcome (Lightbown & Spada, 1990). Nevertheless, what is observed in class may lead us to further research into the question of the specific effects of communicative language teaching on sociolinguistic competence.

Given the limited nature of the present study, how can we account for the observed result? It is likely that the inherent characteristics of sociolinguistic competence may hold the key. As suggested above, the teaching of sociocultural rules is a very challenging task for L_2 teachers. As today no one would overlook the importance of social, cultural, and pragmatic elements in communication when learning a foreign language, we can see that CLT has become a well-recognized approach in foreign language teaching. Hence, it is so patently obvious that foreign language classroom practices in different parts of the world are often claimed to be oriented toward such competence. However, considerable debate exists as regards the extent to which it is feasible to instruct sociolinguistic competence. On the one hand, some do not seem to show much confidence in the feasibility of teaching, thus contending that supposing the classroom environment is appropriately structured and well-organized, L_2 learners will develop this kind of competence naturally along the course of their learning. In addition, following this line of argument, it has often been suggested that the sociocultural aspect of linguistic competence will be picked up unconsciously in the process of acquiring more readily instructable features such as grammatical rules, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Holmes & Brown, 1987).

On the other hand, others have contended that the learner should be made aware not only of what native speakers use to express themselves (i.e., linguistic forms), but also of how they can do it properly (i.e., language use). For example, Edmondson *et al*. (1984) place special emphasis on the importance of cognitive learning, which is the acquisition "of knowledge about communicative norms, values and presuppositions of one's own and the target culture" (p. 124). Whereas, to date, there have been few studies focusing on the efficacy of teaching sociolinguistic competence, the existing research indeed appears to lend support to the view that formal instruction of the sociocultural rules of language use can help L_2 learners communicate more appropriately and effectively with native speakers of the target language (e.g., Billmyer, 1990; Holmes & Brown, 1987; House, 1996; Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001).

Based on the result of the present study that poor sociolinguistic performance is likely to relate to the lack of teaching in class, this may be taken as suggestive of directions for

future instruction in communicative language programs. Given that knowledge of the target sociocultural conventions governing linguistic behavior and underlying surface forms seems central to the acquisition of sociolinguistic awareness in L_2 (Sifianou, 1992), the foreign language teacher, through a systematic teaching of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge, can help learners express themselves more appropriately and prevent them from unintentionally causing offense or misunderstandings. In contrast, "a laissez-faire, or osmotic approach, in which the teacher expects students to simply 'pick up' or absorb relevant knowledge without explicit teaching, risks disempowering learners, depriving them of choice and sophistication in their use of English" (Holmes & Brown, 1987, p. 543). In addition, we need to recognize that teaching sociolinguistic competence is by no means a straightforward and easy task. One obvious reason is that teaching such competence requires much sensitivity because whereas learners "are fairly amenable to corrections which they regard as linguistic, they are justifiably sensitive about having their social . . . judgment called into question" (Thomas, 1983, p. 104).

However, it is possible that if teachers are too prescriptive in terms of what constitutes appropriate behavior, learners may lose the chance of finding ways of employing L_2 that they personally find comfortable (Holmes & Brown, 1987). This issue is of great importance because it relates to L_2 learners' motivation. A great number of studies and experiments (see, e.g., Dörnyei, 1998) have amply shown that motivation is an indispensable key to success in any human learning task. No doubt certain target language features may seem offensive, incomprehensible or too foreign to learners; thus, if they are not allowed to decide not to adopt these L_2 features precisely, they may not be motivated enough to learn the L_2 well. In other words, to enhance learners' motivation level, they certainly need to be given the right to violate certain target culture norms, if the violation is marked. This way they may find themselves motivated to learn the L_2 well. The speech act of complimenting is a case in point. We can often hear that an American would compliment on someone's appearance by saying '*what a gorgeous dress you have on today!*,' but a Chinese may never do that because while compliments are frequently given to show the speaker's friendliness or to start a conversation in American

culture, it is not in Chinese (Yu, 1999). Therefore, forcing Chinese learners of English to act exactly like Americans to compliment a lot may backfire.

After all, cultural norms become psychologized as aspects of personality, so it would seem unreasonable to expect learners to totally change their personalities. Accordingly, L_2 teachers need to be aware of the degree to which learners are learning the target language for instrumental purposes, i.e., to function effectively in another culture and to further a career goal, but perhaps not to 'pass' as a native, or for integrative purposes, i.e., "to integrate themselves into the culture of the second language group and become involved in social interchange in that group" (Brown, 2000, p. 162). L_2 teachers can thus be aware of how or why their students are motivated in L_2 acquisition process. The issue of the degree of L_2 teachers' awareness of their students' motivations may be of particular importance for Chinese learners of English because as stated earlier, research has suggested that Chinese culture of learning may lead these learners to perceive the CLT approach as unsuitable to their needs (e.g., Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b; Grabe & Mahon, 1981; Hu, 2002). If some learners indeed feel this way, it does not come as a big surprise to find them low-motivated.

The above discussion clearly shows that L_2 instruction may be further complicated by the fact that language and culture are intricately interrelated with each other. It goes without saying that L_2 teachers need to increase learners' sociolinguistic awareness involved in cultural norms in order to assist them in improving their L_2 communicative performance. Moreover, as cultural conventions are so deeply ingrained in every individual that he or she cannot really escape his or her own culture, L_2 teachers cannot expect learners to forego their cultural identity and totally conform to the target culture norms. It seems that maybe the optimal goal of L_2 instruction is to help learners become aware of, rather than reduce, cultural differences. That is, learners should be provided with adequate knowledge that will facilitate their understanding of these differences. It is hoped that they may thus become more flexible toward and tolerant of cross-cultural variations, and even when they decide not to conform to other cultural norms, they will at least be able to identify the sources of possible misunderstandings (Sifianou, 1992). As a

result, L_2 learners "will be enabled to avoid appearing impolite, hypocritical, or ironical, and also to make less biased judgments of others" (p. 208). Learners' chances of experiencing cross-cultural miscommunication can thus be greatly reduced.

Conclusions

The present study was designed to observe Chinese EFL classroom behaviors and learning outcomes regarding the development of sociolinguistic competence. The purpose was to find out how different foreign language teachers interpreted the component of sociolinguistic competence in terms of their classroom practices, and whether these practices had any effect on learners' development of this competence. The results suggest that while the observed instructors differed in their interpretation of communicative competence, they devoted very little time to activities oriented to sociolinguistic competence and that classroom practices did not seem to have much effect on learners' sociolinguistic performance. One possible direction for future studies may focus on the classes that are instructed in sociolinguistic competence and look into the instructional effects. This line of study may thus be conducive to a better understanding of instructional influences on L_2 learners' sociolinguistic acquisition.

Specifically, the findings of the present study have practical educational implications in L_2 learning and teaching. On the one hand, L_2 learners may need to understand pragmatic aspects of the target culture better in order not only to speak grammatically but also to interpret appropriately what they hear and to interact effectively with members of the target culture. On the other, L_2 teachers may need to incorporate many cross-cultural pragmatic analyses in their teaching in order to address learners' possible communicative problems (Canale & Swain, 1980). In other words, through paying conscious attention to the relevant sociocultural factors in a given context, L_2 teachers can better help learners avoid lapsing unconsciously into the norms of their native language and thus causing unintended offense.

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Using World Literatures to Promote Intercultural Competence in Asian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The following paper re-examines the place of literature in Asian EFL contexts. Critiquing standard approaches for teaching literature to English learners in Japanese university settings, the author proposes an alternate pedagogical framework for ELT practitioners in Asia based on an interculturalist perspective. Rather than English language acquisition serving as the only goal of instruction with literature, it is suggested that the concept of intercultural competence can also act as an educational aim. Using excerpts from English-language literary works from around the world, the paper describes specific teaching techniques that can improve students' English abilities while simultaneously enhancing their cross-cultural skills and contributing to their personal growth.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, ELT, intercultural competence, literature teaching, world literatures

Introduction

Literature occupies an ambiguous position in English education departments in Asia. For some, literature is an impractical addition to English as a foreign language (EFL) programs (e.g., Lin, 2004, pp. 2-3; Suzuki, 1975). In this view, the teaching of literature does not promote skills needed in the "real world," such as conversation, reading and writing skills. Literature classes are seen as taking up valuable time that could be better devoted to improving learners' overall communicative abilities. Others maintain that the study of literature can offer concrete benefits for language learners (e.g., Mahoney, 1991; Takagaki, 2002). They suggest literature classes can contribute to learners' personal

development by instilling a joy for reading and awareness of other cultures. They also claim that students can improve their English vocabulary and reading skills in the process.

This paper, which makes special reference to university-level EFL education in Japan, generally agrees with the second body of opinion in that it accepts that literature is relevant for language learner and can yield the benefits just mentioned. However, it offers a somewhat different approach for teaching literature to EFL students. Drawing on insights from the field of intercultural communication, the paper suggests that the concept of intercultural competence can be helpful for organizing literature-based lessons. Instead of the usual narrow focus on British or American literature, the paper also justifies the inclusion of and outlines how to use English-language literature from other cultures – or world literatures – in EFL settings.[1]

Approaches to Teaching Literature in Japan

The four most common methods for teaching English-language literature in Japan are probably stylistics, literary criticism, the English language teaching (ELT) approach, and the *yakudoku* method ("translation method"). These four approaches may overlap at times, but for convenience's sake they can be viewed as being based on separate educational philosophies.

According to Buckledee (2002), "Stylistics involves the analysis of structures of lexis in order to understand how the creative writer exploits the ambiguity of language to mean one thing while apparently saying another" (p. 10). The approach closely scrutinizes the idiosyncrasies of particular texts, encouraging the reader to speculate on the connection between linguistic choices and literary effect. Only the text itself is focused upon; questions concerning authorial background or the cultural significance of stories are not discussed in this approach.

Widdowson (1975) suggests stylistics may provide a link to the disciplines of linguistics and literary criticism. Using stylistics, non-native speakers with little experience analyzing literary texts can start by dissecting how words are exploited in

texts and move on to critically assessing written works or pursuing in-depth linguistic studies. From an initial emphasis on language via stylistics, Widdowson claims, students are able to acquire the necessary skills to proceed to higher levels of literary and/or linguistic analysis.

Literary criticism differs from stylistics in that it is a term that has been "applied since the seventeenth century to the scientific investigation of literary documents in regard to such matters as origin, text, composition, and/or history" (Goodvin, 2005, para. 1). This framework mainly endeavors to explain the principles underlying works, interpret literary texts for readers who may have trouble understanding them, establish standards by which the merits of works are judged, and justify the reading and study of literature (Ibid, para. 2).

Two basic philosophies can be discerned within the field of literary criticism. The first, typified by the New Critics, argues that literary works should be treated as self-contained entities; anything outside the text is seen as irrelevant for analysis. The second – led by Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytical and other critics – argues that texts cannot be separated from the socioeconomic contexts in which they were produced and/or their authors' lives and backgrounds. In the case of feminists and Marxists, issues of power, inequality and social justice figure prominently in their analyses.

The ELT approach, in contrast, views literature in a more practical way. As its name implies, this approach views literary works as texts whose primary use is to promote language acquisition among English learners. Rather than simply lecturing, English instructors design tasks to help students to understand grammar points, build vocabulary and improve reading comprehension in English. Common activities include cloze exercises, jumbled sentences, role plays, and prediction exercises (Savvidou, 2004, para. 10).

Learner-focused as such, the ELT approach strives to minimize "teacher talk" and place more responsibility on students to educate themselves. Learners are encouraged –

in pair, group and class activities – to engage with texts and produce language. The belief is that by being actively involved in the reading of literature students will remember more of what they were taught and become more fluent in English.

The *yakudoku* method combines many of the features of the approaches just mentioned but nonetheless is unique enough to warrant separate treatment. *Yakudoku* is comprised of two Japanese words, *yaku* and *doku*. *Yaku* means "translation," while *doku* means "read." Hino (1988) defines *yakudoku* as "a technique or a mental process for reading a foreign language in which the target language sentence is first translated word by word, and the resulting translation reordered to match Japanese word order as part of the process of reading comprehension" (Quoted in Norris, 1994, p. 25).

Although it is largely unknown in other countries, the *yakudoku* method is the most common approach used to teach literature in Japan. Two nation-wide surveys conducted by the Japan Association for College English Teachers (JACET) revealed that between 70 to 80 percent of teachers in Japanese high schools and universities use *yakudoku* techniques when teaching literature (Ibid).

In line with many Confucian educational tenets, the *yakudoku* method is teacher-centered. After students produce translations of texts that are given to them, they are checked for accuracy by their instructor. The reasoning behind the method is that it will enable students to improve their English grammatical competence and vocabulary skills. In addition to using translation exercises, the instructor commonly lectures about English-language literature in Japanese, outlining plots, describing characters and interpreting stories' meanings for students. Students are not asked their opinions of literary works in English as it is considered beyond their abilities.

The approaches just outlined have both merits and demerits, depending on the particular context in which they are used.

Stylistics, by focusing strictly on language, can be helpful for some non-native speakers learning English. It can enable learners to understand how words are used by authors and how sentences are composed for effect. A shortcoming of stylistics, however, is that it can be a dry approach to language learning. Applying stylistics to Shakespearian sonnets or the poems of Longfellow, as suggested by Buckledee (2002), is not something that would motivate typical Japanese EFL learners. Indeed, the difficulty of deciphering such complex texts can de-motivate students and promote the view that literature is irrelevant for their needs. The approach also neglects the importance of culture, treating language as an entity onto itself.

Literary criticism, on the other hand, often draws attention to culture and social issues. This can make texts easier to understand and more meaningful for language learners. Still, only advanced learners have the analytical and language skills to understand this approach. Literary criticism is too complex an undertaking for most EFL learners. Moreover, when discussions are not dominated by the instructor, they may become sidetracked by ideological debates, leaving less time to devote to language and/or culture learning.

The ELT approach is more attractive to most language learners as students' main purpose for taking language classes is to improve their English. Teaching techniques from applied linguistics, developed through careful research on reading skills, can efficiently promote language acquisition in students. Moreover, a major benefit of this approach is that it is student-centered. Research has indicated that learners improve their language skills best by "doing" rather than "being told" (Lin and Guey, 2004, p.10). Yet a major problem with the ELT approach is that it often does little to promote students' intellectual and personal development. An instrumental view of literature is adopted with the aim being simply "to learn English"; the distinctiveness, philosophical worth and aesthetic value of literary prose are lost in the process (Widdowson, 1984, p. 161).

The *yakudoku* method is probably the least effective approach for the EFL classroom. With this form of teaching, students have no involvement in what they are being taught.

Made to translate difficult texts, students come to associate literature with drudgery and boredom, not as a means to acquire practical linguistic skills or new insights. Forced to accept the lecturer's interpretation of a text, students are unable to offer their own viewpoints or relate to the characters or themes in the story. The method may help some students improve their grammatical skills or learn new words, but no evidence suggests it contributes to English fluency or promotes interest in reading (Norris, 1994).

Of course, no single method can be used in all contexts. As teachers and students vary in learning styles, it is up to the instructor to decide what is most effective and practical for a given educational context. Nonetheless, the weak points of standard approaches should be kept in mind and literature instruction should ideally – and simultaneously – strive to involve students in their own learning, pique their interest in reading, raise their cultural awareness, and improve their language skills.

Toward an Intercultural Approach to Literature Teaching

In this section, I would like to suggest a new model for teaching literature to EFL students. Based on insights from the field of intercultural communication, this approach could be called the Intercultural Approach to Literature Teaching (IALiT).

While language teaching traditionally has treated language and culture separately, more recently ELT specialists have begun emphasizing that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for a learner to be truly proficient in a language. What is also needed, they argue, is an understanding of the culture in which the target language is used. In the words of Seelye (1997), "the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice versa. The wherewithal to function in another culture requires both prowess in the language and knowledge of the culture" (p. 23). An intercultural approach to ELT is advantageous in that it integrates both language and culture into lessons, more adequately preparing learners for real world communicative contexts.

A common aim of intercultural education is to develop what has become known as intercultural competence (IC).[2] Broadly speaking, intercultural competence can be

defined as the ability to interact with people from other cultures. As might be expected, an individual with IC is highly aware of and sensitive to the key role culture plays in the communication process. He or she

> … is someone who is able to see relationships between different cultures – both internal and external to a society – and is able to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people. It is also someone who has a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures – someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural. (Byram, 2000, para. 9)

Michael Byram (2000), a leading authority on intercultural education, breaks down IC into five components that can also be viewed as teaching objectives:

(1) *Attitudes.* Learners should be curious, open-minded and flexible, or ready "to suspend disbelief" about others' cultures;

(2) *Knowledge*. Learners should understand "social groups and their products and practices" and "the general processes of societal and individual interaction" in their own and foreign countries;

(3) *Skills of interpreting and relating*. Learners should be able "to interpret a document or event from another culture" in relation to their own cultural perspective;

(4) *Skills of discovery and interaction*. Learners should be able "to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices" and "operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction";

(5) *Critical cultural awareness*. Learners should be able "to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products" in their own and others' cultures and countries. (pp. 8-13)

Before this model is used in conjunction with the teaching of literature, one shortcoming first needs to be remedied: The concept of intercultural competence generally presents the native speaker from America or Britain as the cultural and linguistic model for English learners. Yet it is misleading to suggest that the "culture of English" is limited to certain geographical areas or nations. As pointed out by writers in the fields of World Englishes (WE) (Kachru, 1992; Rajagopalan, 2004; Widdowson,

1994) and English as an International Language (EIL) (McKay, 2004; Nakamura, 2002; Phan Le Ha, 2005), English is no longer "owned" by any particular culture and belongs to the world at large. Subsequently, a wide array of Englishes are spoken and used worldwide and it cannot be assumed that knowledge of American or British culture will be relevant in many international contexts. While English learners do need to know about the cultures of traditional bases of English, they also need to be exposed to world cultures and non-mainstream varieties of English if they hope to truly become interculturally competent.

Nevertheless, the ethnocentric biases of intercultural education can be rectified when teaching literature. All that is necessary is to include works in English by authors from regions of the world where English is regarded as a second or foreign language. Africa and Asia, in this respect, each possess English-language literatures that can be used in ELT contexts. Many African and Asian authors, in fact, have earned international renown and won prestigious literary awards such as the Booker Prize and Nobel Prize for literature (Mahoney, 1991, p. 2). By analyzing such forms of world literature in the EFL classroom, students can improve their English skills as well as what might be better termed their International Intercultural Competence (IIC).

Teaching Suggestions

As the intercultural approach to literature education suggested in this paper is a new concept, there are no textbooks or previous studies to consult for teaching ideas. Nonetheless, I have developed and tested several instructional techniques that ELT professionals in Asia and elsewhere might find useful. I would now, therefore, like to discuss three specific techniques for promoting intercultural competence that I have successfully used in the past with Japanese EFL students. They are as follows: (1) Culture clashes; (2) English snapshots; and (3) contrastive analysis.

(1) ***Culture clashes.*** This technique is based on a scene from a story that demonstrates a clash of cultural values or conceptions. After the instructor provides some background information on the work and conducts a warm-up activity, students are given the text to

analyze in groups. Participants determine the cause of the conflict, the underlying cultural assumptions of the actors, and how the clash could have been avoided. They are also asked to draw lessons from the example.

One of my favorite excerpts to use is by R. K. Narayan, an Indian author, from his book *Swami and Friends*. The story, notable for its highly readable prose and understated humor, focuses on the exploits of a 10-year-old Indian boy named Swaminathan ("Swami") during the British colonial era in India. The scene in question appears near the beginning of the book and takes place during Swami's "Scripture period" at Albert Mission School:

> The Scripture period was the last in the morning. It was not such a dull hour after all. There were moments in it that brought stirring pictures before one: the Red Sea cleaving and making way for the Israelites; the physical feats of Samson; Jesus rising from the grave; and so on. The only trouble was that the Scripture master, Mr Ebenezar, was a fanatic.
>
> 'Oh, wretched idiots!' the teacher said, clenching his fists, 'Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they see? No. Can they bless you? No. Can they take you to Heaven? No. Why? Because they have no life. What did your Gods do when Mohammed of Gazni smashed them to pieces, trod upon them, and constructed out of them steps for his lavatory? If those idols and images had life, why did they not parry Mohammed's onslaughts?'
>
> He then turned to Christianity. 'Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to Heaven. He was a real God. Trust him and he will take you to Heaven; the kingdom of Heaven is within us.' Tears rolled down Ebenezar's cheeks when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Sri Krishna: 'Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that archscoundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practise dark tricks on those around him?'
>
> He paused for breath. The teacher was intolerable today. Swaminathan's blood boiled. He got up and asked, 'If he did not, why was he crucified?' The teacher told him that he might come to him at the end of the period and learn it in private. Emboldened by this mild reply, Swaminathan put to him another question, 'If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?' As a Brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a God should be a non-vegetarian. In answer to this, Ebenezar left his seat, advanced slowly towards Swaminathan, and tried to wrench his left ear off. (Narayan, 1954 [1935], pp. 5-6)

Through being given background information and analyzing this excerpt, students can learn many things about Indian history and culture. They learn, for one, that India was at one time part of the British Empire. As India has been an independent nation since 1947, many Japanese students are unaware of its colonial history. Students also learn that the British colonialists established an education system in which Indians were taught in English, and that the widespread use of English in India today can be traced to this era.

The conflict in the passage, students easily note, was sparked by Ebenezar, a British teacher. Swami seems to accept that he must attend Bible classes as part of his education, finding some of the stories interesting. However, he becomes angered by Ebenezar's condescending attitude toward Indians and disrespect for India's religions. Insulted by Ebenezar's word choices ("dirty," "lifeless") and contempt ("wretched idiots"), Swami poses complex questions to his teacher to embarrass him.

The text reveals cultural differences in other ways. That Swami is a "Brahmin boy" acknowledges his caste within Indian society. Within the caste system, Brahmins represent the highest class and "the Untouchables," the lowest. However, in this scene the teacher, being British, pays no regard to Swami's caste. The text mentions as well that Swami, being a Brahmin and Hindu, is a vegetarian. For this reason, "it was inconceivable to him that a God should be a non-vegetarian."

Although this is a fictitious story, students are asked to imagine it actually occurred and what could have been done to avoid the problem. One common answer is that Britain never should have colonized India and that colonialism inevitably involves the domination of one culture by another. Within the framework of the story, students see Swami's anger as justifiable and that Ebenezar should have demonstrated more respect for Indian customs and beliefs.

The lesson students learn from the passage is the value of cultural tolerance. The scene ends on a humorous note with Ebenezar trying to "wrench off" Swami's ear, yet in real life such religion-based conflicts can end up with far more serious consequences.

(2) *English snapshots*. The idea of this technique is to use passages from literary works to raise learners' awareness of non-standard varieties of English. Although "English snapshots" is my name for the technique, the rationale behind it comes from linguist Braj Kachru. In a brief essay in which he advocates using non-native literatures in English for teaching English, Kachru (1999) states:

> … such literary texts are a repertoire of resources for providing linguistic and cross-cultural explanations to show (a) how English has been 'modified' in new non-Western contexts of Asia or Africa, (b) how stylistic innovations are determined by the cultural contexts and the localized style range, (c) what effect such innovations have on, for example, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability, and (d) what is meant by acculturation of English in 'non-English' social and cultural contexts. In other words, what it means to use English for cross-cultural communication. (p. 148)

The excerpt I will use in this instance comes from *The Year of the Dragon*, a play by Singaporean author Chu Lik Ren. It consists of a dialogue between a young man named "Lung" and "Grans," his grandmother. The passage is useful for drawing attention to the unique use of interjections and particles in Singaporean English, or "Singlish":

GRANS: Eh? How come you're ironing. (No reply) *Ai-yah*! Are you going to wear that?

LUNG: Yep.

GRANS: *Ai-yah*. Why don't you wear another one? It'll be so hot after you iron it.

LUNG: I like this one.

GRANS: Then you should have told me earlier. *Ai* – come-*lah*, come. I'll do it for you (She takes over. Lung sits on the sofa. He lights a cigarette.) I was going to iron this tomorrow … I know you like this one but I didn't know you need this tonight. If you had told me, I would've done this for you. Then, you don't need to rush like this. (Pause) Where are you going?

LUNG: See a show.

GRANS: *O*. With … ah, what is her name-*ah*?

LUNG: Veronica.

GRANS: *Oi*? This isn't the one. Is it? There was another one …

LUNG: Mei Ling.

GRANS: *Ah*! Yah, Mei Ling! *Eh*? So? What happened? Why are you not taking Mei Ling? I thought you were going together-*what*?

LUNG: Yah.

GRANS: So? You don't like her anymore-*ah*?

LUNG: (Gently) *Ai-yah*. I do-*lah*. I just wanted a change for tonight.

GRANS: *Choy*! How can you simply change here and change there?

LUNG: Times have changed-*what*. (Quoted in Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 339)

With this particular text, students are simply asked to note the use of *ah*, *lah*, *ai-yah*, *what* and other interjections and particles. They are then asked to speculate on their meaning and significance. Japanese students who analyzed the text were largely able to guess the meaning of expressions such as *Oi*? ("Huh?"), *O* ("Oh, I see"), *ai-yah* (a sound to indicate surprise and mild annoyance), *ah* (a sound that roughly means "answer me" and sometimes has confrontational overtones), and *Choy*! (a sound to indicate exasperation).

The particles *lah* and *what*, however, required some explanation. *Lah*, the most common of all particles in Singapore English, is used for emphasis and conveying emotion. As Singapore English tends to equally stress all words and lack the intonation characteristic of mainstream English, *lah* serves as a means to foster informal closeness (McArthur, 2003, p. 340). "Come-*lah*" in the above passage, then, would roughly mean "Oh, all right, come with me, then" (with the intonation being informal and close). "I do-*lah*," similarly, would mean something like "But I do, Grandma."

What as a particle, on the other hand, conveys an objection to something just inferred by a previous speaker. Basically, *what* means the speaker rejects the implied thought or behavior of the other person (Wierzbicka, 2003, pp. 343-345). "I thought you were going together-*what*" would suggest the grandmother disapproves of Lung's dating another girl at the same time as Mei-Ling. "Times have changed-*what*," Lung's rebuttal, conveys disagreement with Gran's apparent negative judgment concerning his behavior.

To further raise students' awareness of linguistic variation, I have students rehearse and act out the dialogue. As noted by Youssef and Carter (1999), drama can be an effective means to enable learners to "feel" the culture of English dialects. I also have them write out their own dialogues in Singapore English using the linguistic features from the above dialogue and additional ones I supply on a separate handout. Both uses of the dialogue help students understand the unique character of this variety of English and counter the notion that non-standard Englishes lack rules and are deficient rather than merely different.

(3) *Contrastive analysis*. One of the best ways to draw attention to the importance of culture in the communication process is to compare and contrast features of particular cultures. This can involve students comparing the cultural assumptions in a text to those in their own culture and/or those of other cultures.

Two texts that are helpful for contrastive analysis are excerpts from the novels *Things Fall Apart*, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, and *A Passage to India*, by British author E. M. Forster. The scene from *Things Fall Apart* is between two Africans, Okoye and Unoka. The former, wishing the latter to repay a debt, employs an indirect and elegant form of communication to convey his wishes by quoting proverbs. With this excerpt, students can be asked to compare the Ibo's indirect form of communication with Western or Japanese discourse styles:

Text #1

Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.[3] Okoye was a great talker and he spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and then hitting it finally. In short, he was asking Unoka to return the two hundred cowries[4] he had borrowed from him more than two years before. As soon as Unoka understood what his friend was driving at, he burst out laughing. He laughed loud and long and his voice rang out clear as the *ogene*,[5] and tears stood in his eyes. His visitor was amazed, and sat speechless. At the end, Unoka was able to give an answer between fresh outbursts of mirth.

[Shows him lines of chalk on his wall.] … 'Each group there represents a debt to someone, and each stroke is one hundred cowries. You see, I owe that man a thousand cowries. But he has not come to wake me up in the morning for it. I shall pay you, but not today. Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them.[6] I shall pay my big debts first.' And he took another pinch of snuff, as if that was paying the big debts first. Okoye rolled his goatskin[7] and departed. (Achebe, 1989 [1958], pp. 5-6)

The second excerpt, from *A Passage to India*, centers on the British character Cyril Fielding and the reactions of Indians to his opinions on living and working in India. Here, students can compare and contrast Fielding's and the Indians' socio-pragmatic rules for conversation. In so doing, they should gather that Fielding employs a frank and direct form of speech that runs counter to Indian notions of gentility and social appropriateness:

Text #2

[Cyril Fielding, the principal of a government college, visits the home of Aziz, a Muslim doctor and friend, who has taken ill. In a discussion with Aziz and other Indians, Fielding freely admits to being an atheist, that many other British people are as well, and that morality is declining in Britain. He is then respectfully asked if the British are justified in being in India.]

…There they were! Politics again. 'It's a question I can't get my mind on to,' he replied. 'I'm out here personally because I needed a job. I cannot tell you why England is here or whether she ought to be here. It's beyond me.'

'Well-qualified Indians also need jobs in the educational.'

‘I guess they do; I got in first,’ said Fielding, smiling.

‘Then excuse me again – is it fair an Englishman should occupy one when Indians are available? Of course I mean nothing personally. Personally we are delighted you should be here, and we benefit greatly by this frank talk.’

There is only one answer to a conversation of this type: ‘England holds India for her good.’ Yet Fielding was disinclined to give it. The zeal for honesty had eaten him up. He said, ‘I'm delighted to be here too – that's my answer, there's my only excuse. I can't tell you anything about fairness. It mayn't have been fair I should have been born. I take up some other fellow's air, don't I, whenever I breathe? Still, I'm glad it's happened, and I'm glad I'm out here. However big a badmash one is – if one's happy in consequence, that is some justification.’

The Indians were bewildered. The line of thought was not alien to them, but the words were too definite and bleak. Unless a sentence paid a few compliments to Justice and Morality in passing, its grammar wounded their ears and paralysed their minds. What they said and what they felt were (except in the case of affection) seldom the same. They had numerous mental conventions and when these were flouted they found it very difficult to function….

[Later, Fielding candidly dismisses the institution of marriage and crudely discusses women with Aziz.]

… ‘There goes a queer chap, I trust he won’t come to grief,’ thought Aziz, left alone. His period of admiration was over, and he reacted towards patronage. It was difficult for him to remain in awe of anyone who played with all his cards upon the table. Fielding, he discovered on closer acquaintance, was truly warm-hearted and conventional, but not what can be called wise. The frankness of speech in the presence of Ram Chand, Rafi and Co. was dangerous and inelegant. It served no useful end. (Forster, 1978 [1924], pp. 112-113, pp. 119-122)

From these excerpts, students learn that effective communication depends more than on words alone. Whereas bluntness of speech is often valued in Western cultures, in other cultures it can be viewed as unrefined and uncouth. The use of proverbs, for example, allows an Ibo speaker to appeal to cultural standards of morality and hint at a desired action from the listener. In Western culture, on the other hand, this discourse strategy would be perceived as odd or “beating around the bush.” In Indian, as in Ibo culture, frankness is not necessarily a virtue. Fielding’s “zeal for honesty” did not endear him to

Indians but rather “wounded their ears and paralysed their minds.” For Azziz, Fielding’s talk was “dangerous and inelegant” and “served no useful end.”

From comparing and contrasting these texts with each other and Japanese culture, students learn how their own communication styles resemble and differ from those in other regions of the world. Appropriate use of English, they realize, depends on the cultural context in which communication is occurring. In the case of some cultures, Japanese may have to alter their own styles very little while in others they may require greater flexibility and patience.

I have yet to gather concrete data on the effectiveness of the teaching techniques I have just outlined. Nonetheless, I would judge my intercultural competence-oriented literature lessons to be successful. Students generally relate that their view of what constitutes “English literature” broadened after being exposed to English writings by non-native speakers. Learners also frequently resolve to be more flexible toward non-standard varieties of English. Interestingly, I have even had students express a desire to visit African and other Asian nations as a result of lessons based on world literatures. What all of this means for actual language acquisition is difficult to say, but an intercultural approach to ELT and literature does appear to intrigue and motivate learners and this can only help improve their English proficiency.

Conclusion

At a time when communicative skills are a major concern in EFL programs, literature may seem to be a frivolous addition to language classes. By putting texts at the center of lessons, the English instructor using literature might be accused of neglecting speaking, listening and practical reading skills.

However, if handled with imagination and care, literature can prove exceptionally useful for English learners. With the intercultural approach proposed in this paper, students can improve their general English reading and discussion skills as well as enhance their intercultural competence. Hardly being irrelevant and outdated, literature remains more relevant than ever as it offers excellent source material for teaching

students practical skills as well as helping them develop as human beings. There is no reason why EFL learners, through literary studies, cannot be enriched emotionally and intellectually as they acquire general communications skills.

To make students' learning experiences as worthwhile as possible, though, instructors do need to heed the strengths and weaknesses of previous approaches to teaching literature. This means doing as much as possible to select texts that are appealing to and relevant for students. Moreover, although the teacher still has an important role to play in the EFL classroom when literature is a focus, greater efforts must be made to empower learners to take an active role in their own education. Finally, in our current age of globalization where English is an international language, the current narrow focus on Anglo-American literature in EFL programs should give way to a broader study of world literatures in English. This more inclusive interpretation of English-language literature will better help students understand and prepare for the diverse ways English is used and perceived worldwide.

Endnotes

1. Please note that my argument is not that American or British literature should not be taught in EFL programs, but rather that a more inclusive approach to literature should be adopted by English educators.
2. Some authors also employ the term Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).
3. Palm oil is widely used for cooking in West Africa. This sentence, which students could be asked to decode, implies that proverbs in Ibo culture smooth communication by making others' words easier to "digest."
4. Cowries are a kind of seashell that Africans once used as a form of currency.
5. An African instrument resembling a gong.
6. This proverb is stated in an ambiguous way. It could refer to Okoye or Unoka. In the first case, it would mean "a worthy man should not beg." In the second case, it would mean "a worthy man should not grovel before others."
7. The goatskin is mentioned earlier in the story. It is basically a mat that Ibo carried with them to sit on.
8. "Badmash" was an Anglo-Indian colloquial word that meant "evil person."

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Age-related Variations in E.F.L Learners' Attentiveness to Prosodic vs. Syntactic Cues of Sentence Structure

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Abstract

This study has investigated the relationship between the age of Iranian EFL learners and the strategy they seek in their interpretation of sentences. A task was devised to solicit either prosodically or syntactically motivated responses from two groups of participants aged 12-13, and 17 and over, respectively. Comparison of the different age groups' performance on the task revealed that younger learners were more inclined to follow prosodic cues and older learners were more inclined to follow syntactic ones.

Key Words: Age, Processing, Prosody, Syntax, Cues.

1. Introduction

1.1. Situation

Teacher: "Suppose your mother has poured you a glass of milk. After a few minutes, she calls out wanting to know if you have finished your milk or not.
Would you say that the glass is half empty or full?"
Student: "It depends on whether you like milk or not?"
Teacher: "In what way?"
Student: "Well, if you like milk you'd say it's half empty; so she'd pour you more milk; if not, you'd say it's half full; so she wouldn't".

(An actual word-for-word reproduction of an oral interaction between the author and a twelve-year old EFL learner, as unfolded at one of the 'Iran Language Institutes' lower-intermediate classes in the Summer of 2005).

There have been innumerable instances of cases of this nature - the baffling spontaneity and analytical prowess of the younger learner's inter-personal communicative L2 skills -

which have prompted the formulation of the ensuing empirical study. Casual observation of the adult learner's somewhat disappointing communicative performance in spite of his far superior edge in academic achievement tests has decidedly provided a rather profound impetus for an empirical study. Notwithstanding the subjectivity from which the above-mentioned observations suffer, they nevertheless mirror the long-established dogma that has commonly been associated with the merits of early age exposure to L2. It has been observed by Stern (1983, p.361) that many notable educators like Erasmus, Montaigne, and Locke have over the centuries argued in favor of "an early age start in second language learning".

The explanatory hypotheses offered in this connection – the merits of early age exposure to L2 - have by and large relied on such diverse grounds as: " biological factors, affective factors, motivation, time allotment, cerebral dominance (hemisphericity), and learning conditions" (Larsen Freeman, 1997, p.175), not to mention language input.

Empirical studies dealing with age-related variations in L2 learning ability, too, have for the most part left much to be desired in unanimity of consensus. Some researchers like Asher & Garcia (1969) and Seliger, Krashen & Ladefoged (1975) have found that in the long run younger learners are more *likely* to attain near-native L2 proficiency in the more natural (ESL) situations. Others, such as Ekstrand (1976, 1978), and Fathman (1975), have claimed that when time is held constant older learners tend to syntactically outperform the younger ones in both natural and planned settings.

These contradictory findings have led to the assertion that there might be some processing dimensions at play which could help account for the rate and degree of L2 acquisition at different ages. In this light, it is the aim of this study to seek empirical evidence for age-related processing preferences of L2 learners.

1.2. Justifications

The theoretical justifications offered for the causes of the said antithetical findings have, on the one hand, revolved around the rationalistic notion of the existence of a 'critical

period' in the learner's life which affects his language learning ability. Proponents of this theory attribute the younger learner's eventual success in L2 proficiency to the plasticity of his brain (Krashen, 1982). Theorists of other persuasions, the cognitivists, however, maintain that older learners are more cognitively equipped to handle syntax (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

From an empirical point of view, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the younger learner's more respectable overall performance in the long run, if not a result of being more fortunately circumstanced syntactically, must be, all things being equal, attributed to some hitherto unknown processing advantage.

Amongst the many processing dimensions needing empirical research, the extent of the learner's attentiveness to prosodic cues, as opposed to the syntactic ones, tends to provide the most reliable and valid of all platforms for the task at hand. Such a platform is deemed reliable on the account of not being as exposure dependent as the post-processing dimensions of success or product like, for instance, pronunciation which is after all enhanced with experience. As for validity considerations, the present study's platform seems to be remarkably compatible since it juxtaposes and contrasts the mentioned cues as they compete, in the course of the same sentence, for the learner's attention.

1.3. Objectives

The hypothetical framework on which this study is based has been derived from studies conducted on L1 processing. The results obtained by Fernald & Mazzie (1991) and Read & Schreiber (1982) confirm the existence of an age-related processing dimension in L1 acquisition. More specifically, it was found that younger speakers are more inclined to attend to prosodic cues of structure, while older speakers relied more on syntactic cues.

In the realm of L2, only one study - Harley (1995) - has tried to shed some light on age-related processing variations of foreign language learners. Harley's (1995) findings, however, due to some unforeseen shortcomings in sample selection, failed to uphold the

hypothesis that younger FL learners are more influenced by prosody and older ones by syntax. Guided by these findings, this study seeks to ascertain age-related variations in L2 processing via the implementation of a task which exacts a measure on the learner's attentiveness to prosodic versus syntactic cues of sentence structure.

1.4. Significance

Should the outcome of this study verify the hypothesis on which it was postulated - namely, that younger learners are more attentive to prosody than syntax and the reverse order to be true for older learners - it would have far-reaching theoretical and pedagogical implications. First and foremost, given the cause and effect relationship generally held to exist between speech perception and production; pinpointing such age-related differences in L2 processing not only accounts for the younger learner's alleged superiority in listening comprehension but also for his eventual near-native L2 production, as noted by Burstall et al. (1974) and Selieger etal (1975), respectively. Furthermore, exposing the potential strengths and weaknesses of different age categories can aid educators in developing appropriate syllabi and teaching techniques.

2.0. Review of Literature

2.1. Theoretical Perspectives

The theories addressing language acquisition in general and the age factor in particular are dispersed along a rationalist-empiricist continuum. At one end of this continuum lies the rationalistic view that language is to a large extent specified biologically, or innately; and on the opposing end, in stark contrast, the role of experience is emphasized through the empiricistic vantage point.

Under the predication of the rationalistic perspectives, according to Harley (1986), language is considered a by-product of neurobiological factors; while, the empiricists maintain that environmental factors are more instrumental in bringing language to bear. Given the long history of heated debates between proponents of the said persuasions - with no clear edge gained by either side - a good number of theorists have opted for more conciliatory, mid-continuum platforms in establishing their theoretical constructs. Thus,

the following elaboration on theoretical perspectives begins with those on the rationalistic end of the continuum and moves toward the more empirically inclined ones as it unfolds.

2.1.1. Brain Plasticity Hypothesis

In so far as neurological evidence is concerned, the forum that has most effectively taken advantage of it is the concept of the 'Lateralization of the brain'. Lyons (1981, p. 249) views this phenomenon as the hemispherical specialization of the brain to perform specific tasks. He further maintains that "process of lateralization is maturational, in the sense that it is genetically preprogrammed but takes time to complete".

The hypothesis put forth by the proponents of lateralization, supported by clinical studies of aphasia, relates the ease with which children acquire language with the so-called "plasticity" of their brains. Penfield & Roberts (1959), as cited by Harley (1986), maintain that the child's brain is more efficient in processing language due to its far greater flexibility, or plasticity, as compared to that of an adult's. It is argued that the child exhibits a sort of natural predisposition to acquire language before the age of nine to twelve. Moreover, according to Harley (1986), Penfield & Roberts claimed that due to a more plastic brain the child has an advantage over his adult counterpart in acquiring the early sets or units of language, while the adult is probably more advantaged in the area of vocabulary development.

2.1.2. A Biologically Based Critical Period

There is ample evidence to believe that language acquisition is more a function of the age of the learner than any other factor. In this connection, Lenneberg (1967) has argued the most forcefully in favor of a period in the learner's life when language is acquired at an optimum level - 'the critical period hypothesis'.

Lenneberg's arguments stemmed from his observation that children of vastly diverse socio-cultural backgrounds tend to achieve almost the same degree of language competence at corresponding stages of life. This finding, obviously, undermines the importance of environmental factors in favor of the biological factor of age.

As with Penfield & Roberts, Lenneberg relies on the concept of lateralization to substantiate his advocacy of early age exposure to L2. Lenneberg's major contribution to the field, however, may be summed up in his provision of empirical support for the claim that language functions are mostly lateralized in the left hemisphere of the brain.

Lenneberg's (1967) research indicated that injuries to the right hemisphere caused more language problems in children than in adults. More importantly, he found that children were not as prone to language loss after surgeries on their left hemispheres, and were more likely to resume their normal language control after such operations. These findings, obviously, hint at the existence of a direct relationship between age and the delegation of language functions to the left hemisphere, or lateralization.

Later empirical research, however, negated Lenneberg's claim that language learning ability atrophies with the completion of lateralization, which he estimated to occur at or around puberty. For instance, it has been suggested via empirical research that lateralization "appears to be established by age four or earlier" (Krashen, 1973, p. 179).

Be that as it may, it appears that Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis is not too solidly founded on the speculated relationship between language acquisition and brain lateralization. Yet, save this shortcoming in Lenneberg's line of reasoning, his critical age hypothesis may not be substantiated by tying language acquisition to brain lateralization, but instead to some other biological factors which reach their peak around puberty.

2.1.3. Cognitively Based Critical Period

In discarding lateralization as the most prominent factor affecting language acquisition, many theorists have resorted to the *principles* of cognitive development in their justification of a puberty-bound critical period hypothesis. There seem to be two major pieces of evidence in support of a cognitively-based approach toward the formulation of a critical age hypothesis. First, a multi-purpose use of language seems to emerge

simultaneously with many cognitive advances that occur in middle childhood, around the age of seven (Dale, 1972). More characteristically important, however, is the view shared by Krashen (1975), Rosansky (1975), and Felix (1981) that the end of the critical period coincides with Inhelder and Piaget's cognitive stage of formal operations. It is cogently argued that the onset of formal operations, or puberty for that matter, signals a shift in the individual's cognitive development toward the construction of abstract explanatory hypotheses in place of the more concrete ones prior to adolescence. This shift of focus in Krashen's (1975) view may hinder language learning ability since the individual now seeks a conscious understanding of language and in so doing could mentally constrict himself in a labyrinth of rules.

Further support for the delimitation of language acquisition at puberty is provided in Elkind's (1970) assertion that the personality changes typically associated with this stage of life signal the close of the critical period. Moreover, it is maintained by Krashen (1975) that the affective variables which Taylor (1974), along many others have come to link with puberty may, to a large extent, be related to formal operations.

Of still other cognitivistic theories, associative learning may also be discerned as quite accommodating in substantiating the critical period hypothesis and the merits of early age exposure to L2. Proponents of associative learning contend that the individual learns by subconsciously forming an association between the new information and his reservoir of previous knowledge and experiences, and thereby attaches meaning to the new information and makes it more accessible for future use (Stern, 1983).

The process of associative learning is dependent on two major factors. First, for ease of perception, the learner relies on his memory to retrieve the existing information in his cognitive network. Next, for production of the learned material the learner's motor skills should be trusted not to fail him (Steinberg, 1982).

With respect to language perception, Steinberg (1982) expects associative learning to reach its peak around the age of five and to have lost a good deal of its momentum by age

ten. This does not imply that learning ceases completely, however, more exposure to language may be necessary to compensate for the loss in the individual's ability to form associations. As for language production, adds Steinberg (1982), quite expectedly, the gradual loss of control over the organs of speech, imposed by age, hampers the older learner's pronunciation. It needs, of course, to be mentioned here that the ability to learn inductively through making associations is one step away from pure rationalism, toward quasi-empiricistic perspectives.

2.1.4. Affective and Social Basis for Age differences

The affective filters related to language learning which come to bear during adolescence were briefly touched upon earlier; however, some theorists have assigned a more pivotal role to them in distinguishing between child and adult language acquisition. In support of the existence of affective and social variables in language acquisition, Smythe et al. (1975) and Taylor (1978) have compared the relative ease with which emigrant children acquire the target language of their newly adopted speech community with the seemingly insurmountable difficulties faced by their parents under the same conditions. It is proposed that emigrant children are more efficient than their parents because they are more adoptive of the new social framework which they encounter. In this connection, Chastain maintains that;

> The advantage children have is due to their flexibility-psychologically, socially, and cognitively. They are so firmly established in their language personality, and social framework of reference as to inhibit their willingness to become part of another language, culture, or social group. (1988, p. 129)

In discussing social and affective factors, however, a distinction needs to be drawn between interpersonal communicative skills and academic, context-reduced, L2 skills. It has been observed that children are better at communicative skills than their adult counterparts for the reasons mentioned above; however, with respect to academic skills, due to their mature cognitive abilities, adults far surpass children (Harley, 1986).

This hypothesis seems compatible with the realities of the L2 teaching environment

where teachers have traditionally been content with explanation of abstract grammatical rules. As might be expected, it has been argued by Taylor (1974), that the older learner's advanced cognitive maturity facilitates his conscious understanding of abstract language rules (Harley, 1986). The older learner's cognitive superiority over the younger learner may, according to Ausubel (1964), be traced to his vast repertoire of L1 lexicon on the one hand, and his far greater ability to analytically generalize the grammatical rules of L2 on the other.

Krashen (1977; 1978), however, downplays the role of cognitive maturity by considering it more of a liability than an asset to the older learner's language acquisition. Through his monitor model, he claims that the adult learner's conscious knowledge of the syntactic rules of L2 is detrimental to his production of the forms of language for he constantly monitors his utterances (McLaughlin, 1987). In retrospect, it seems that Krashen's arguments are not at odds with Ausubel's since, as it will be recalled, children and adult learners of L2 may be considered more efficient than one another based on their communicative vis-à-vis academic skills, respectively.

2.1.5. Classroom Interaction and the Nature of the Input

For all intents and purposes, the viewpoints discussed so far may all be stratified along the continuum of planned vs. natural environments. The natural setting affords the learner real life exchanges with native speakers of the target language. As a result, the learner acquires the rules of L2 inductively via his subconscious. Furthermore, in natural settings, the focus is on meaning and exchanges of ideas, or simply stated what language is used for (Chastain, 1988). In planned settings, however, the learner is quite aware of his conscious efforts to learn the target language. Hence, learning takes place deductively, through explication.

In so far as the concept of the 'critical age hypothesis' holds true, it may be argued that the natural setting favors the younger, pre-adolescent learner whose language related faculties are well in tact. However, given the nature of the planned environment, or the classroom, if you will, the older learner, due to his cognitive maturity, not to mention his

adjustability to the infra-structure of the classroom, is more successful in learning the rules of L2 than the younger learner.

2.3. Empirical Literature

Lenneberg's theoretical perspectives have served as the backbone for the recent empirical scrutiny afforded to the relationship between the learner's age and his/her language learning ability. Relying on his 'critical period' hypothesis, Lennneberg has strongly favored early age exposure to L2 by asserting that: (a) acquisition in childhood will lead to greater success, and (b) acquisition process will be different between children and older learners (Lenneberg, 1967).

In line with these claims, empirical research has developed in two distinct ways. Firstly, the research guided by Lenneberg's 'Early age exposure=success' assertion has focused on the relationship between the learner's initial age of exposure and his/her overall proficiency in L2. Secondly, his psycholinguistically oriented conclusion has stimulated research on how language is processed at different ages. Hence, the empirical studies reviewed hereunder are categorized into the effects of age on the learner's rate and route of acquisition.

2.3.1. Rate of Acquisition

The parameters traditionally deemed relevant in the rate of L2 acquisition at different ages may be dichotomized into the extent of achievement in: (a) context-reduced or academic skills; and (b) context-embedded or communicative skills. For a more meaningful analysis, the nature of language input is also addressed in terms of planned versus natural exposure.

2.3.1.1. Planned Settings

Ekstrand (1978) in an 18-week program for Swedish school children between the ages of eight and eleven found that older children were better in imitation, listening comprehension, and translation than younger ones. Through the use of the audio-visual

method, the role of the teacher was reduced to a minimal level. The results obtained confirmed the existence of a critical period which sets in motion around the beginning of formal operations. This conclusion appears well-founded given the dependence of the audio-visual method on the principles of associative learning. Hence, the older the child, the more likely he is tap into his existing knowledge base to form meaningful associations.

Burstall's (1975) large scale study on 17,000 British school children compared the rate of achievement in learning French of those who began the three-year program at the age of eight with those who started at eleven. Of the skills tested, older learners were found more efficient in listening, reading, and writing, that is, the context-reduced academic achievement measures, whereas the younger learners were more skillful in speaking which may be considered an interpersonal communicative measure.

Olson & Samuel's (1973) study on 100 English L1 participants exposed to phoneme drill treatments of German found that after 10 sessions, adults and junior high students scored higher on pronunciation measures than elementary students. This finding, again, hints at an advantage enjoyed by older learners in context-reduced tasks. Snow & Hoefunagel-Hohles (1977) research on English speaking participants via audio-tape of five different Dutch words found that in the short term, older learners were more native-like in pronouncing the words; however, the younger learners pronunciation surpassed the adults', in being native-like, as time progressed.

2.3.1.2. Natural Settings

Ekstrand's (1976) study on 2189 English L1 participants, between the ages of 8 and 17, tested on listening comprehension, reading, free writing, pronunciation, and speaking of Swedish L2 found that older learners out-performed the younger ones on these context-reduced measures.

Ervin-Tripp's (1974) study of 31 English speaking participants, aged 4-9, exposed to

French for nine months found the older child to be more superior in syntax, morphology, and pronunciation. The tasks were mostly decontextualized and consisted of imitation, translation and acting out of the sentences. It was further inferred that older learners performed more efficiently on the tasks involved due to the 'cognitively demanding' and 'semantically anomalous nature' of the sentences.

In another study involving 1000 immigrant children exposed to English in Canada, Cumming (1981 a) reported that the participants who arrived at older ages performed better on context-reduced skills. However, it was also reported that the time taken to reach a pre-determined level of proficiency was not related to age of arrival.

Fathman's (1975) study on 200 immigrant children exposed to English in the U.S.A. provided further proof for the prediction that performance on context-reduced skills is enhanced with the relative cognitive maturity of older children. More specifically, through the use of such measures as the SLOPE test and picture description he found that older children performed better on morphology and syntax; whereas, the younger participants' performance on pronunciation, solicited by the latter more context-embedded measure, was judged more superior.

2.3.2 Route of Acquisition

In spite of their relative recentness, empirical studies on the effects of age on the route taken in acquisition of language have proved to be phenomenally illuminating. The bulk of these studies have addressed the issue from an L1 perspective, with one more recent exception in L2. However, due to the similarity of the tasks employed in these studies, the conclusions arrived at tend to propagate optimum validity.

Studies on L1 confirm the view that the age factor affects the processing strategy embarked upon in acquisition of language. Fernald & Mazzie's (1991) study compared the strategy sought by the participants in telling a story to toddlers as opposed to adults. It was found that adult participants intuitively resorted to more heavily stressed suprasegmental patterns in relating the story to toddlers than to adults.

The ‘Competition Model’ of language use has been widely used in studying *learners’* preferences in sentence interpretation. For instance, MacWhinney & Price (1980), and Bates et al. (1984) discovered that younger children were more likely to follow phonological cues than syntactic ones in their interpretation of sentences. Likewise, Kail’s (1989) study on French speaking participants revealed that preference for phonological cues in identifying the agent/subject of the sentences was decisively more rampant in the youngest age category. In a further study addressing the relationship between age and preference for syntactic versus prosodic cues of sentence structure, Read & Schreiber (1982) found that adult university students were less influenced by phonological contours in conflicting sentences than 7-8 year old participants.

Being inspired by studies on L1, Harley (1995) sought to determine whether the same age-related tendencies apply in the processing of L2. Thus, to test the validity of the hypothesis that younger learners in processing L2 follow prosody and older learners pursue syntax, Harley (1995) administered a 30-sentence task to a sample of 56 Cantonese L1 participants and compared the results so obtained with those she collected from a sample of 30 native speakers of English.

The participants were asked to repeat a certain part of each audio-taped sentence that was played for them in sessions lasting about 15 minutes. By repeating the subject noun phrase of the first five sentences as models for the participants to follow, the researcher implicitly directed the participants to repeat this particular grammatical segment of the remaining structures, without mentioning any grammatical terms in her instructions.

The first five model sentences all contained prosodic contours that were in harmony with syntax. The remaining 25 sentences, however, included 10 phonologically ambiguous sentences with conflicting prosodic and syntactic cues. The principle underlying this task was based on the assumption that the participants’ preference for prosodic and syntactic cues of the ambiguous sentences is tied to whether they are influenced by the conflicting cues, or if they are able to correctly identify the subject

noun phrase of the sentences. Quite naturally, if a participant repeated the prosodically altered segment, in its entirety or parts thereof, it would have to be determined that he was following prosody. By the same token, if a participant could identify the subject noun phrase, without regard to prosodic stimuli, he would have to be following syntax.

Harley (1995) divided her participants into three different age groups, and each group itself was stratified into learners and native speakers. The first age group was composed of 7-to 8-year old participants - 13 learners and 10 native speakers. The second group was made up of 12- to 14- year old participants - 27 learners and 10 native speakers. The last age group of 17- to 23- year old participants included 16 learners and 10 native speakers. All learners were of Chinese descent, with Cantonese L1, enrolled in grades 2, 7-8, and 12 in Canada. None of them had lived in Canada less than a year and some had received formal L2 instruction in their native country.

Harley found out that the learner participants of all three age groups scored surprisingly high scores on following prosody - 5.23, 5.52, and 5.31 out of a maximum of 10 - in their performance on the ambiguous sentences. With respect to syntax, however, their means ranged from 1.92 for age group 1 to 1.00 for age group 2, and 2.69 for age group 3.

The native speaker participants of the first age group scored the *highest* mean in following prosody, 5.70, with scores of 4.40 and 2.40 registered for age groups 2 and 3, respectively. In following syntax, the older native speakers scored the highest mean, 5.60, followed by 4.30 for the second age group and 1.92 for the first. Based on these results, Harley concluded that her learner participants, in contrast to her native speaker participants, were more influenced by prosody than syntax regardless of their age group. Thus, Harley's (1995) study did not provide enough evidence in support of the hypothesis that younger learners are more attentive to prosody and older learners to syntax.

It needs to be mentioned here that the results obtained by Harley (1995) should not be taken at their face value as sufficient in rejecting the prediction that younger L2 learners

differ from the older ones in their language processing. Harley, herself, pointed out that due to the possibility of positive transfer from her learners' highly tonal L1, Cantonese, the validity of her study may have been adversely affected. Furthermore, one may find fault with the non-uniformity of the L2 input that her participants received due to the diversity of the grades from which they were selected. Finally, as a result of a not logically related and sequenced exposure that one receives in a natural environment, the input may not have been optimally comprehensible.

The present study is based on the same hypothesis as Harley's - namely, that younger learners in their interpretation of L2 rely more heavily on prosody, while older learners attend to syntax. However, unlike Harley's sample of L2 learners, the participants of the present study were of a non-tonal L1, Persian. Hence, it is anticipated that the participants of this study would not be as predisposed to phonological cues as Harley's participants were, due to a lack of L1 transfer. Furthermore, the participants of this study were all selected from the same grade and had all received their L2 exposure in a planned environment, thus minimizing the adverse effects of non-uniform and incomprehensible input that Harley's participants allegedly suffered from.

3. Methodology

The method conceived for this study is modeled after Harley's (1995) work. Called the 'Competition Model', it is based on the assumption that the learner's processing preferences come to surface when he/she is presented with conflicting cues at the sentential level. For the sake of optimum comparability with Harley's study, the present study not only replicated the task used by Harley, but also the procedures followed in its administration and analysis of data.

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of EFL learners of predominantly equi-distant socio-cultural backgrounds enrolled at the Iran Language Institute's level 4, in Shiraz. The deciding factors for choosing level 4 participants, whose proficiency corresponds to ACTFL's low intermediate level, as the target population were that: a) not many young learners were

enrolled in higher levels, and b) the topics covered by the sentences of the task are for the most part somewhat child-like and thus not suitable for EFL learners of advanced standing.

At the time of administration of the task, the participants, who were all newcomers to level 4, had been exposed to 220 hours of formal instruction in English in completing the previous levels. Moreover, the participants' grade point average for the previous level fell in the range of 80 to 90. Hence, every effort was made to ensure that the participants were homogenous in terms of their proficiency in L2. Furthermore, it was anticipated that the results obtained from the participants would not be adversely affected by the variable language input due to the uniformity of the syllabi and the teaching method applied to the participants.

The participants consisted of 40 EFL learners of both genders randomly sampled from a target population of approximately 600 level 4 students. The sample was then stratified into the following age groups with 20 participants in each:

a) *twelve and thirteen year olds* - to comply with Lenneberg's critical age hypothesis which considers this two year span as the cut off period in the individual's language learning ability; and,
b) *seventeen and over* - to account for the gradual loss of control over the motor skills associated with the adult learner.

3.2. The Task

The participants were asked to listen to a list of 30 audio-taped sentences presented to them individually and one at a time. Following the termination of each sentence the tape was halted so that the participant could repeat the part which he/she identified as the subject noun phrase. The first five sentences contained compatible prosodic and syntactic cues. The tester, himself, demonstrated what was expected from the participant by repeating aloud the subject noun phrases of these five sentences.

The next five sentences also displayed conforming prosodic and syntactic cues to

make the participants feel at ease with the task. The remaining 20 sentences, however, contained 10 ambiguous ones with prosodic contours at odds with syntax. To create a sentence with conflicting cues, the prosody for a certain part of a phonologically well-formed sentence was transposed on the corresponding part of another. For example, the prosody for the italicized part of sentence 1 below was used for the underlined part of sentence 2:

Sentence 1: *The new teacher's watch* has stopped.
Sentence 2: *The new teachers watch* baseball on television.

Should the participant in repeating the subject noun phrase of sentence 2 not alter the prosody, he/she in all likelihood is more influenced by the prosodic cues presented to him/her. By the same token, if the participant changes prosody to match syntax, he/she may be considered more attentive to the syntactic cues of the sentence.

The conflicting cues of the ambiguous sentences were of three main types. In the first type demonstrated above, the sentence was pronounced in such a way that the stress fell after it normally should (i.e., on *watch* rather than on *teachers*). In the second type of ambiguous sentences, the stress fell before its normal position as sentence 4 below demonstrates:

Sentence 3: *Our dogs bark* at neighborhood cats.
Sentence 4: *Our dog's bark* sometimes frightens people.

After switching over the italicized segment of sentence 4 with that of sentence 3, in pronouncing sentence 4 the stress is placed prior to the end of the noun phrase.

The third type of ambiguous sentence, although similar to type 2 in the sense that the stress falls before the expected point, is far more challenging since the head noun is not phonologically separated from the rest of the sentence by a pause. The third type of ambiguous sentence is illustrated below:

Sentence 5: When they are *wild, animals are brave.*

Sentence 6: Trainers of *wild animals are brave*

A complete list of all 30 sentences with a classification of the more ambiguous ones is provided in the appendices.

3.3. Procedure

The participants were seated individually in front of the tester across a table with two tape recorder/players - one to play the pre-recorded sentences and the other to record the participants' responses. Then, the following instructions were provided to the participants:

i. The first five sentences were meant to serve as models. The tester would complete the task by repeating a special part after each sentence was played. The participant, by listening to the tester's responses to the first five sentences, would be expected to determine what part of the remaining sentences he/she is expected to utter - no grammatical terms were mentioned;

ii. The participant's responses to the next 10 sentences, 6 to 16, would be corrected, if necessary, in order to direct his/her attention to the part expected to be uttered; and,

iii. The participant should withhold his/her response until the completion of the sentence being played.

4. Results and Discussion

In keeping with Harley's (1995) study, the results obtained were categorized into:

i. performance on unambiguous sentences; and

ii. performance on ambiguous sentences.

4.1. Performance on Unambiguous Sentences

Of the fourteen opportunities they were given to register their preferences, the older

learners were successful 11.45 times while the younger learners mean score stood at 10.35. As will be recalled, the unambiguous sentences contained non-conflicting prosodic and syntactic cues. Hence, the *participants' scores* on items of this type is a measure of their success in correctly identifying the subject noun phrase, or being attentive to syntax.

In spite of the seemingly close performances of the two age groups on the unambiguous sentences, it was found through a t-test that the older group of participants scored a significantly higher mean than the younger one - (see table 1). The said results serve to prove that even in the absence of prosodic stimuli, given the non-conflicting nature of the cues, the younger participants were less apt to follow a syntactically motivated strategy in their interpretation of the unambiguous sentences than the older ones. Hence, it seems that even at this rudimentary stage of the study sufficient evidence is circumstantiated for the hypothesis that younger learners pursue a different route in processing language from older learners.

Table 1 Comparison of Participants performance on unambiguous I Items (Max.=14)

Age group	**No of Participants**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t.obs.**	**Significance Level**
12-13	**20**	**10.35**	**2.25**		
17+	**20**	**11.45**	**3.29**		

4.2. Performance on Ambiguous Sentences

In comparing the participants' performance on the ambiguous sentences, two platforms offered relevant grounds for analysis. First, a within group comparison compared participants of the same age group on their performance on the ambiguous items by contrasting their preference for prosodic and syntactic cues. Through matched t-tests, it was to be determined whether there existed any meaningful differences between the

participants' preference for syntax and prosody within each of the two age groups. Quite clearly, if the hypothesis, that younger learners are more attentive to prosody and older ones to syntax, was to be upheld; it needed to be established that that participants of the younger group would score higher means on following syntax than prosody, while participants of the older group would score higher means on syntax than prosody.

Secondly, a between group analysis of the performance of the participants compared one age group's preferences in interpreting the ambiguous items with those of the other's. Here, a higher score on prosody by the younger group, as opposed to a higher score on syntax by the older group would have provided enough evidence in support of the hypothesis.

4.2.1. Within Group Comparisons

A matched t-test comparison of the participants' mean scores on the strategy sought in interpreting the ambiguous items revealed that the younger group's preference for prosodic cues was significantly higher than their preference for syntactic cues. The older group's preference for syntactic cues over prosodic ones, however, was found to be insignificant (see Table 2).

Table2. Within Group Comparison of Participants Performance on Ambiguous Items (Max.=10)

Age Group	**Ms**	**Mp**	**SD**	**t.obs.**	**Significance Level**
12-13	**2.35**	**6.3**	**0.713**	**5.8683.**	**Ms<Mp**
17+	**4.65**	**4.3**	**0.398**	**0.7537**	**n.s**

Key:

Ms= Mean Instances of following syntax

Mp= Mean Instances of following prosody

Significance Level of Ms/Mp Differences(matched t-tests) ***p*<.01**

n.s= Not Significant

With respect to the highly significant difference in the younger age group's preference for prosodic cues over the syntactic ones, it may be asserted that the findings partially verify the hypothesis in the sense that younger learners rely more heavily on prosody than syntax in processing language. However, the older group's non-significant difference does not, without a between group analysis, provide sufficient grounds for the rejection of the hypothesis in absolute terms.

4.2.2. Between Group Comparisons

In order to facilitate this analysis, the data collected was classified into the following response categories, as recommended by Harley (1995):

i. those instances where the respondent followed the sentence syntax in identifying the segment of the sentence to be repeated;
ii. those instances where the participants attended to prosody;
iii. those instances where the syntax of an ambiguous sentence was altered by the respondent to match prosody;
iv. an aggregate of responses to categories ii and iii; and,
v. other types of responses where the respondent either repeated the whole sentence, said one word or nothing at all.

The comparison of responses to the first two categories, via analyses of variance (see Table 3), quite clearly, provided for a most solid foundation for the hypothesis that at the sentential level prosodic cues are preferred by younger learners and syntactic cues win the favor of the older ones. Moreover, a comparison of the two age groups' responses to categories iii and iv lends further support to the hypothesis in the sense that the differences between the means, though not significant, are indicative of a higher amount of attention paid to prosody by the younger age group. In regard to the responses tallied under the last category, the older group's lower mean score suggests that the older participants were less confused by conflicting cues, and hence, more likely to distinguish between syntactic and prosodic stimuli.

Table 3 Between Group Comparison of Participants Performance on Ambiguous Items (Max.=10)

Strategy Sought	12-13 Mean	17+ Mean	F	Significance Level
Following Syntax	2.35	4.65	32.9002	*p>.01
Following Prosody	6.30	4.35	14.9351	*p>.01
Adjusting Syntax	.25	.10	1.5400	n.s
Prosody+Adj. Syntax	.30	.15	1.2668	n.s
Other Strategies	1.15	.70	3.3824	n.s

5. Conclusion and Educational Implications

In retrospect, it seems that the overall direction of the findings provides sufficient evidence for the hypothesis that the age factor does play an instrumental role in the route a learner takes in processing L2. As with native speakers of previous studies and unlike Harley's (1995) Cantonese L1 participants, the participants of the present study confirmed the existence of age-related variations in processing L2 for Persian L1 learners of EFL.

In the light of the diametrically opposed findings of the present study and that of Harley's, in spite of the implementation of the same task and procedures, the following explanations may be offered. First, with respect to tonality versus non-tonality of the L1s of Harley's and this study's participants; it may be asserted that her participants were by way of background more biased toward phonology than syntax. In fact, Cantonese is considered one of the world's premier tonal languages; and this may in itself account for the syntactic approaches adopted by Harley's participants across all age groups. In contrast, Persian is not a tonal language, and as a result of a minimal likelihood of positive transfer, the performance of the present study's participants is more reflective of the effect of the age factor than the influence of L1.

Secondly, the participants of the present study were all exposed to L2 in a planned setting. Thus, through such measures as needs analysis, placement tests, and systematic syllabus design, a balance was sought between the learners' existing L2 knowledge and the new material they were to learn. Consequently, the learners were at no time faced with drastically unfamiliar L2 terrain, and this in turn may have resulted in optimum input comprehensibility and the resulting surge needed in the older learners competence to overcome the processing of ambiguous sentences through syntactically-motivated strategies. However, due to the haphazard nature of L2 input in natural surroundings, there is no guarantee that Harley's participants enjoyed the luxury of comprehensible input in their L2 exposure.

Turning now to the pedagogical overtones of the findings, a major effort needs to be undertaken in redesigning those syllabi that do not take age-related needs of L2 learners into account. Clearly, for younger learners, the designers need to place more emphasis on grammar. This, however, would be best accomplished by taking advantage of the younger learners' more acute sound discrimination capacity. For instance, new grammatical points could be introduced and worked on through grammar centered listening comprehension passages and dialogs.

With older learners, owing to their relative weakness in sound perception, the syllabi need to be more focused on phonology. Here, it seems that for maximum efficiency the designers should approach the task by resorting to the older learners' more developed sense of analogy and grammatical competence. It might, for example, be quite a rewarding experience, contrary to general belief amongst practitioners, to lay down the rules governing the phonological component of L2 in clear terms.

Furthermore, in considering the current state of EFL teaching in developing countries, one must not fail to appreciate the importance of homogeneous classes in terms of learners' age. More often than not, because of financial and other extrinsic considerations, learners of various ages are enrolled in the same class with little, if any, attention paid to

their needs or varied learning strategies. Learner disorientation resulting from teachers' shifts in focus to accommodate the varied needs of the students is one common outcome of such heterogeneous classes. Teachers, too, often find themselves in an awkward situation in the sense that their attempts to make a particular point understood to a certain age group inadvertently results in another group's alienation.

APPENDIX A

THE COMPETING CUES TASK

List of Sentences:

1. My older sister never cleans her room.
2. The kids in the hall are very noisy.
3. The corner store sells a lot of candy.
4. A cold drink of lemonade tastes good in the summer.
5. The Grade Three class is studying dinosaurs.
6. Most of my friends like school.
7. My new bicycle is broken.
8. Sandy and her friend went to the movies on Saturday.
9. The rabbit in the classroom loves carrots.
10. Too much candy will make you sick.
11. The big black cat had four kittens.
12. The new teachers watch baseball on TV. (Type 1)
13. The fastest runner wins the race.
14. Trainers of wild animals are brave. (Type 3)
15. Your sisters answer questions quickly. (Type 1)
16. My friend Jason came to play yesterday.
17. A large piece of chocolate cake will fill you up.
18. The young student guards don't get tired easily. (Type 2)
19. The girl's lunch was terrible.
20. The leaves on the maple tree are turning red.
21. Only some winter birds fly south. (Type 3)
22. Our dog's bark sometimes frightens people. (Type 2)
23. In winter, windy days are cold.
24. My friends play the piano at school. (Type 1)
25. Our neighbor's fish lives in a tank. (Type 2)
26. His new puppy has run away.
27. Almost all young children like to eat cake. (Type 3)
28. This old house needs to be painted.
29. All my friend's work was lost on the bus. (type 2)
30. Three little kittens lost their mittens.

APPENDIX B
CONSTRUCTION OF AMBIGUOUS SENTENCES

In each pair of the sentences below, the phonology for the italicized part of the first replaced that of the second one:

Type 1 *The new teachers watch* has stopped.
The new teachers watch baseball on TV.

My friend's play made every one laugh.
My friends play the piano at school.

Your sister's answer surprised everyone.
Your sisters answer questions quickly.

Type 2 *Our neighbors fish* in the lake on weekends.
Our neighbor's fish lives in a tank.

Our dogs bark at neighborhood cats.
Our dog's bark sometimes frightens people.

All my friends work at McDonald's.
Al my friend's work was lost on the bus.

Type 3 When they are *wild, animals are brave*.
Trainers of *wild animals are brave*.

At the beginning of *winter, birds fly south*.
Only some *winter birds fly south*.

When they are *young, children like to eat cake*.
Almost all *young children like to eat cake*.

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EFL Student Teachers' Learning Autonomy

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Bio Data

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate English language learning autonomy among EFL student teachers in Turkey. Fifty-seven first year student teachers in the English Language Teaching Program of a Turkish University participated in this case study. Qualitative data were gathered through structured and unstructured class observations, structured and unstructured interviews with students, and document analysis. To strengthen the study design through triangulation, quantitative methods of data collection were also applied for more vigorous interpretation of the students' capacity for self-assessment in autonomous language learning. This was conducted using a Swiss version of the Council of Europe's self-assessment checklists, and one of the past examination papers of FCE (First Certificate in English December 1998). Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that the students seem to be unable to identify what language to master and how to do so efficiently. Furthermore, results indicate that they lack the capacity for self-assessment in monitoring their own language learning process. Suggestions are put forward to encourage student teachers to become more autonomous. This assumes that increased awareness of autonomous learning and its benefits will enhance their own self-governing capacity which may, in turn, contribute to higher achievement and motivation. As a consequence, it is argued that this development among student teachers may have a positive effect on the development of autonomous learning among their future students.

Key words: EFL, learner autonomy, autonomous language learning, self-assessment.

Introduction

In all of the educational contexts in Turkey (including primary, secondary, and higher education), no significant steps are being undertaken to promote autonomous language learning within and beyond the classroom, and learning is mainly directed and evaluated by the instructors. With the predominance of teacher-led English language instruction in Turkey, learners are seen as passive receivers of new information and are therefore unlikely to develop the skills necessary to learn how to assess and control their own progress. In such cases, learners do not sufficiently develop the skills to perform real-life communicative tasks effectively. Consequently, although Turkish learners are highly motivated to learn English for socio-cultural and economic reasons, teacher feedback and classroom observation at various institutions lead to the conclusion that their proficiency in English is not at the desired level. In such a context, Turkish learners need to develop a critical awareness of language learning and learning communication. These are the main considerations of learner-centred language curricula which promote language learning autonomy as proposed by Brindley (1990), Coleman (1988), the Council of Europe (2001), Hutchinson and Waters (1988), Munby (1991), Nunan (1989, 1990), and Wilkins (1976). The Common European Framework (CEF) (Council of Europe 2001) further elaborates upon the concept of language learning autonomy, describing in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop to act effectively as autonomous learners. By providing a common basis for the explicit description of objectives, content and methods, the CEF also promotes international co-operation with different educational systems in the field of modern languages all over the world. In these circumstances, it is worth questioning some aspects of language learning autonomy on the basis of the criteria proposed by the CEF.

In light of these circumstances, this paper will investigate whether EFL student teachers are able to direct and monitor their learning process for autonomous learning. To achieve this goal, it will question whether the student teachers are able to set language learning goals and work towards them through self directive skills, how the tasks and activities used within and beyond the classroom promote autonomous learning, and

whether the student teachers' ratings of their language skills through the CEF self-assessment checklist level B2 compare with the scores they get from FCE.

This study firstly provides a short contextual background concerning student teachers of EFL in question. It then gives a definition of the various terms employed in the field of autonomy. The subsequent literature review looks at research conducted in both western and, significantly, eastern educational contexts and attempts to summarise the little research undertaken with Turkish learners. The methodology section provides description of its purpose, its scope, its limitations, and the instruments used in it, and then it analyzes both the qualitative and the quantitative data. Lastly it summarises the existing problems and suggests possible solutions.

Definition of the terms

Since the primary concern of this study is EFL student teachers' autonomy as language learners, definitions of autonomy here refer to both students and teachers' autonomy just as learners. Holec (1981, p.3) defines the term as "the ability to take charge of one's own directed learning". Little (2003) points out more precisely that "the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self-management and in interaction with others" (cited on line). In this sense, autonomous learners decide what to learn, when and how to learn it by taking responsibility for their learning. This process of personal responsibility in monitoring their own progress entails the use of self-assessment as one of the instruments to determine their level of knowledge and skills (Gardner, 1999). It is seen as one of the pillars of learner autonomy because it helps learners to focus on their own learning (Harris, 1997).

Review of literature

The CEF for advancing student autonomy was piloted in various European countries, and results from those studies indicated how it encouraged reflective learning and learner autonomy (Council of Europe, 2002). Kohonen (2001), in research connected with the CEF conducted under the auspices of the Council of Europe, argued that the language

teacher had a significant role as a resource person for autonomous language learning, and the teacher's professional growth was directly connected with language learning, teaching, and evaluation.

Sullivan and Lindgren (2002) investigated the promotion of self-assessment and reflection in the adult second language (L2) classroom in Sweden using a method which provided the students with an opportunity to look into their own writing composition processes, both linguistically and holistically, as they viewed and discussed the reasons behind the different actions during the writing process. Results indicated that after using the method, all writers experienced useful, although different, insights into their own writing behaviors. The self-assessment tools of the CEF were implemented in different contexts in Switzerland, and high correlations were consistently seen between the self-assessments and the standardized tests (Wilson and Lindsey, 1999 cited in Council of Europe 2002) indicating the fact that they were reliable instruments for the learners in assessing themselves. Ross (1998 cited in Council of Europe 2002) concluded after a meta-analysis of 60 reported studies that self-assessment provided robust concurrent validity with criterion variables. Bachman and Palmer (1989) and Blanche (1990) also found high correlations between self-assessment and test results or teacher assessment. However, a closer examination of the process of self-assessment suggested that the degree of experience which learners brought to the self-assessment context influenced the product. "A European Language Portfolio-Pilot Phase 1998-2000" which was coordinated by the Modern Languages Section of the Council of Europe comprised 20 national and trans-national pilot projects which had been carried out in 14 European countries and which concerned all sectors of education - primary, secondary, higher, as well as further education for adults. Based on the results gathered, it was suspected that learners have a tendency towards overstatement (or understatement) of their proficiency regarding both the concept and practice of learner self-assessment. Therefore, there is common agreement that both learner and teacher training is vital to facilitate and develop learner autonomy (McCarthy, 2000; Scharer, 2000). Spolsky (1992, cited in Council of Europe, 2002) summarizes the situation by saying that it has been shown that learners are able to assess their own language proficiency with reasonable accuracy if two basic

conditions are met. Firstly, it is important that there is no special encouragement to give inaccurate answers, as it would induce a tendency to please, to be rewarded or to avoid penalties. Secondly, the responses required must be about aspects of language proficiency which are within the experience of the answerer.

Of important note here is that all of the studies in the above review have been conducted in western countries that have similar educational systems and social environments. However, self-directedness in learning is socio-cultural reflection (Kasworm, and Bing, 1992), and so actual learning and teaching situations gain meaning in their social contexts (Palfreyman, 2003). Harmer (2003, p.288) points out that "the social context in which learning takes place is of vital importance to the success of the educational endeavour". Holliday (1996 and 2003 in Palfreyman and Smith Eds.) further explains the tension between the need for a greater social awareness of local forms of autonomy – termed as "social autonomy" (2003) - and a desire for culture–free professionalism in international English language education while suggesting that all English language educators need to be constantly critical and aware of the social influences and implications of what they do. Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) also outlines how information about intercultural communication that is integrated with methodology training can foster greater awareness of sociocultural relativity in teacher trainees.

To counter this anglo-centricity, this section reviews the studies conducted in eastern cultures where significantly different approaches are adopted to teaching and learning. It is often assumed that such a pedagogical approach in the East does not generally allow or foster students to take responsibility (Biggs, 1994). In this respect, Jones (1995, cited in Littlewood, 1999, p. 72) sees autonomy as "laden with cultural values, especially those of the West" and inappropriate for the traditions of learning and teaching in Cambodia, but later describes how ready his students are for autonomous language learning. Gieve and Clark (2005) compared reflections written by Chinese students with those of European students, finding that the Chinese students actually appreciated the benefits of autonomous study as much as European students, and claimed to make equally good use of the opportunity. Littlewood (2000) compared perceptions of autonomy among students

studying in eight East Asian countries with those of the students studying in three European countries, and concluded that Asian students' responses to the items in the questionnaire gave clues to the ways in which they would like to be active and independent similar to European students. He attributed the claimed passive classroom behaviors of the Asian students to the educational contexts provided for them, rather than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves. Holden and Usuki (1999) who questioned Japanese students' perceptions of learner autonomy likewise concluded that it was not the learners who were innately passive, but it was the educational system that created an environment which discouraged learner autonomy. The follow-up studies of Usuki (2001; 2002) provided more evidence that Japanese students were aware of their needs as autonomous learners, but a gap between their awareness and their actual behavior seemed to be the main problem because of the negative effect of the educational system. Ho and Crookall (2000), in investigations into learner autonomy in the more traditional organization of classrooms in China, discussed in detail the cultural traits that both hindered and encouraged autonomy in such a setting, concluding that it was through concrete actions of taking responsibility that genuine autonomy was learnt.

This research into Asian learners indicates that both eastern and western educational systems both recognize the importance of more autonomous learning, yet stand perhaps at different points in its historical implementation. With this in mind, it is not unrealistic to expect to achieve autonomous language learning in more teacher-dominant contexts such as Turkey, even though its successful implementation may take longer. The problem remains as to how research can inform teaching practice in this context and, in this regard, studies into autonomous learning remain scarce in Turkey. Broadly viewed, its educational system could be regarded as being similar to those of other eastern countries. Of the few studies conducted, Yumuk (2002) investigated the role of the Internet in promoting a more autonomous view of learning in an academic translation course. In her conclusion it is stated that the impact of an Internet search-based academic translation course on learners was positive, in that they were encouraged to perceive translation as a process requiring more responsibility from the learner rather than a text, a dictionary or the teacher as the source of information. While this action research

investigation presented us with a positive point of view on the future of autonomous language learning, other descriptive studies in the Turkish context provide clues about how learner autonomy could be influenced by previous learning experiences (Canbolat, 1997; Keskekci, 1995; İskenderoğlu, 1992; Palfreyman, 2001). The general impression is that the Turkish educational system is mainly directed and evaluated by the authority and, as a result, has a significant influence on learner autonomy in Turkish context. For example, the majority of the university level students lacked necessary critical thinking and reflection skills to cope with the requirements of academic life such as skills of how to plan, conduct and evaluate research (Karasar, 1984; Buyukozturk, 1996; Buyukozturk, 1999; Karagul, 1996; Koklu and Buyukozturk, 1999). Most importantly, Erdogan's (2003) study into student autonomy at a Turkish secondary school concluded that teacher factors hindered the development of learner autonomy because the teachers themselves had been trained within the same education system, and were unable to change their habits.

Little (1995), McGrath (2000), Smith (2000), and Tort-Moloney, (1997) also provide evidence that teachers who themselves are not autonomous language learners may have a negative influence on the development of autonomy in their students. Stiller and Ryan (1992), and Clemente (2001) likewise suggest that teacher autonomy support and involvement (and parental support for autonomy and involvement) have direct links with students' assimilation of their classroom context and subsequent academic outcomes. Usuki, (2002) attracts attention to teachers' attitudes towards their students which may play a key role in learner autonomy. Probably, those are the reasons why most of the things have stayed the same in Turkish educational system although it has been changed periodically for decades. For example, the last trend is towards the use of the tools of autonomous learning in all the areas of kindergarten through higher education. Yet, traditional approaches to learning and teaching are still being used by the teachers with old beliefs since the beliefs that individuals have play a decisive role in the process of autonomous learning (Cotterall 1995).

There may be some other factors hindering teachers from effectively involving themselves in this process. Firstly, they may be afraid of the students who improve fast independently while the teachers make little or no progress because they are not autonomous learners themselves. Secondly, particularly state schoolteachers can earn money without trying hard, and then they do not strive to learn new things. In that connection, introducing new things to student teachers can be a good starting point. So, this study has targeted student teachers studying in English Language Teaching Program of a Turkish University to lift one of the main barriers in front of the future of autonomous language learning. Although this case study is limited with reference to the small number of the participants and institutional focus, it is hoped that it may help improve the situation in similar contexts by serving as a model for other studies.

Finally, some reference needs to be made to the fact that teaching is often influenced by the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), i.e. how we teach now is sometimes mirrored by how we were taught ourselves. If we were taught in a teacher-led transmission style, we may be likely to slip into that same mode of delivery despite excellent teacher training into autonomous learning. The problem, as Almarza (1996) indicates, is that teacher training ignores student teachers' own previous learning experiences. This is a teacher's "hidden pedagogy" (Denscombe, 1982) in that it is formed through experiences as a child even and has never been challenged. If that is the case, teacher training which ignores this apprenticeship formed from the pre-training stage is unlikely to be effective in convincing student teachers as to the benefits of autonomy and in dislodging old, embedded methodological beliefs.

Method

This case study aims to reveal whether EFL first year student teachers in the English Language Teaching Program of a Turkish University are able to direct and monitor their language learning process. The following questions are addressed in order to achieve aforementioned aim:

1) Are the student teachers able to set language learning goals and work towards them through self-directive skills?

2) Do the tasks and the activities used in the courses aim to help the student teachers promote autonomous learning?
3) Do the student teachers' ratings of their language skills through the CEF self-assessment checklist level B2 (the level at which the learners are supposed to be) compare with the scores they get from FCE?

Based on the findings, recommendations will be put forward so as to establish their present learning and future teaching on the philosophy of autonomous language learning.

The scope and limitations of the study

Fifty-seven first year students in the English Language Teaching Program of a Turkish University constituted the subject group of this case study. The generalizability of the study was limited due to this institutional focus. The data collection carried out adopted a triangulated approach of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to strengthen both the validity and the reliability of the study design.

The qualitative data on autonomous language learning were gathered through structured/unstructured class observations and structured/unstructured interviews with students. Three courses (Spoken English II, Reading Skills II, and Writing Skills II) were observed for six weeks, and 48 students were interviewed during the office hours from April 1 to May 14, 2004. All related documents such as annual/daily plans, assignments, and projects were also analyzed. In the quantitative approach only the students' capacity for self-assessment for autonomous language learning was considered. They were also observed in the classes and were questioned in the interviews for a more vigorous interpretation. The quantitative data were collected by means of the Swiss version of Council of Europe's self-assessment checklists, and one of the past examination papers of FCE (December 1998). There were two main reasons why FCE was used to measure proficiency level of the students; firstly, it was linked to B2 level of the CEF descriptors; and secondly, the format of this test was broadly familiar to the students since it was accepted for exemption from preparatory classes by the university where this study was carried out. In all, 54 students completed the self-assessment checklists from April 1 to May 21, 2004. Data from the self-assessment checklists were entered into an excel sheet.

Although the papers of FCE were concurrently administered to the same students, only 50 of them completed all the papers in the exam. Four students who were not able to complete one or more papers in FCE were removed from the data.

Description of the courses observed

The Program follows the curriculum specified by the Council of Higher Education. Descriptions of the classes observed are as follows:

Speaking Skills II: This course focuses on oral communication skills and strategies. It aims to help students to speak fluently with correct pronunciation, intonation, and at a reasonable speed. Students are encouraged to develop their skills of informal conversation and formal speech through in-class practices and rehearsals of presentations.

Reading Skills II: This class enables students to read unfamiliar, authentic texts accurately and efficiently, focusing on awareness of the relations between vocabulary, structure and meaning.

Writing Skills II: This test develops students' essay writing skills, focusing on example essays, comparison-contrast essays, and cause-effect essays. It improves students' use of linguistic structures at the discourse level, particularly the relation between form and text type. It aims to encourage students to produce compositions which show their awareness of grammar in appropriate context.

Description of the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) Exam

This is an upper intermediate level exam, set at Level B2 of the Council of Europe's CEF. It consists of five subtests. The listening comprehension subtest has audio-taped short extracts and longer monologues from radio programmes, news, features, etc. Students are expected to show understanding of detail and gist, and to deduce meaning. The reading comprehension subtest contains four parts made up of a text and corresponding comprehension tasks assessing the ability of the subjects to read semi-authentic texts of various kinds and to show understanding of gist, detail and text structure, and to deduce meaning. The writing subtest consists of two tasks. It assesses the ability to write non-specialized text types such as letters, articles, reports, compositions and reviews of 120-

180 words covering a range of topics and target readers and also set texts. The Speaking Test assesses the ability to interact in conversational English in a range of contexts for which purpose materials such as photographs and drawings are provided for stimulus. The standard test format of the speaking subtest involves two subjects assessed by two examiners. There are multiple choice cloze, open cloze, 'key' word transformations, error correction and word formation task types in the use of English subtest.

The five FCE papers total 200 marks, after weighting. Each paper is weighted to 40 marks. A subject's overall FCE grade is based on the total score gained by the subject in all five papers. The minimum successful performance which a subject requires in order to achieve a Grade C corresponds to about 60 % of the total marks (FCE Handbook, 2001).

Description of the self-assessment check Lists

The CEF specifies language knowledge, skills and use by providing a series of level descriptors. Six broad levels (A1-A2, B1-B2, and C1-C2) are, respectively, upper and lower interpretations of the traditional division into elementary, intermediate and advanced. B2 Level corresponds to the upper intermediate level. The self-assessment checklists based on the CEF are used by the learners to record what they can do in order to evaluate the progress of their communicative proficiency in the different languages. 'Can Do' descriptors are provided for reception, interaction, and production. If a learner has over 80% of the points ticked, they have probably reached Level B2 which corresponds to grade B of FCE (about 80% of the total marks) (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 1).

The documents examined

As part of the overall evaluation, the following documents were analyzed:

1) 2003-2004 academic year general annual plan for the pre-school classes,
2) 2003-2004 academic year ELT annual plan for the pre-school classes,
3) National Pre-school Education Programme (MEB, 2002),
4) analysis of the questionnaires for the parents, and,
5) revision of the course book (Ellis and Hancock, 1999).

Analysis of the qualitative data

Interviews

Only volunteer students (n=48) were interviewed in their mother tongue (Turkish) for about 20-40 minutes during the office hours of the researcher from April 1 to May 14, 2004. The interviews took place in an informal atmosphere, so that the student felt free to express themselves. The researcher took notes during the interviews since the students did not feel comfortable talking on tape. Four main questions constructed for the students are as follows:

1. What are your short/long term objectives in learning English?
2. What are your strategies and procedures to pursue these goals?
3. What materials do you use for independent learning?
4. How do you evaluate your progress?

All of the students stated that their main objective was to be better in English. However, they failed in identifying either specific language areas which they wanted to emphasize, or their strengths and weaknesses. 46 of the students interviewed stated that they did not have a specific means to evaluate their own progress. Furthermore, they claimed that the person who should undertake this task was the teacher. One even expressed some indignation that he should be responsible for assessing himself:

> "How dare I evaluate myself. I am only a student who can be easily mistaken. What are the teachers for if I am supposed to evaluate myself."

Nevertheless, all of them stated that they had a self-perception of some improvement in all aspects. Only two of the students claimed that they kept vocabulary note-books to observe their progress.

The students' responses to the third question have been classified and calculated as percentages as indicated in table 1 (n=48). As it is clear from the table, they stated that learning English had a place in their lives in some contexts other than the classroom. However, they did not believe that their attempt was satisfactory.

Table 1 The students' responses to the third question (What materials do you use for independent learning?)

Material	n	%
Staged books (5-7)	12	25
Novels	9	19
Magazines & newspapers	10	21
Songs	32	67
TV (BBC, CNN, CNBC etc.)	12	25
Foreigners	9	19
Grammar tests	21	44
Cinema	18	38
The inter-net	12	25

Classroom observations

The researcher constructed an observation form adapted from the criteria proposed by Mynard and Sorflaten (2003) in order to specify the tasks and activities used within and beyond the classroom to promote autonomy of the learners (Table 2). Inasmuch as the feedback was mainly based on impressions, she graded each course according to the frequency of the activities on the observation form on a scale of 1-5 with 5 showing the highest, and 1 showing the lowest frequency of the learning opportunities observed. Besides, she took notes on other points so that she could develop a profile of the lesson. Firstly, each learning opportunity on the observation form was graded for three different courses separately on the scale. Secondly, those three grades given to each opportunity were averaged out to just one grade as it is marked on the table. It was hoped that this technique would illustrate the issue more clearly. The average grade for all courses was found to be '2.2'. Observations also indicated that most of the learning opportunities listed in the observation form below were not created except for pair and group works in all courses, keeping diaries, and, to some extent, peer and self editing in writing courses. On the other hand, the courses had some strong points. Among these was the effect of the semi-circular formation in all classes which allowed the 18 students to interact face-to-face. Also, there was an atmosphere of security and friendship in each lesson, exhibited by the fact that students seemed to be enjoying the activities and willing to participate. The lessons seemed to be well-organized and demonstrated a variety of activities.

Table 2: Learning Opportunities Created by Teaching Situations to Help Learners Promote Independent Learning.

Learning opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
a) Giving choices (For example: choose activity A or B for homework or choose someone to work with.)			x		
b) Encouraging group work				x	
c) Encouraging learners to predict how well they did on tests	x				
d) Encouraging learners to set some learning goals		x			
e) Encouraging learners to use authentic materials outside the classroom		x			
f) Encouraging learners to keep learner diaries		x			
g) Encouraging learners to build reflection and extension into activities		x			
h) Encouraging self and peer editing		x			
i) Creating a self-access facility in the classroom		x			
j) Encouraging self-assessment		x			

Document analysis

Documentation analyses also made it clear that the language teaching program was not designed to help learners direct their learning efforts towards more autonomous learning and assess their development in the process of learning.

Analysis of the quantitative data

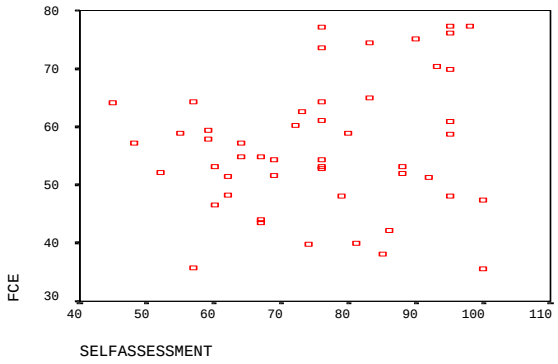
The inter-rater reliability of the oral interview sub-test of FCE (December 1998) was estimated using a random sample of 10 students. It was w = .411. Intra-rater reliability of the writing sub-test was r = 0.90. Other estimated values of the reliability were as follows: α = .85 for the reading comprehension sub-test, α = .67 for the use of English sub-test, and α = .69 for the listening sub-test. Finally, as the required time for FCE is too long (1 hour 15 minutes for the reading sub-test, 40 minutes for the listening sub-test, 1 hour 30 minutes for the writing sub-test, and 1 hour 15 minutes for the use of English sub-test), each part was administered at different times to assure reliability. After all the papers had been administered, the students' scores were converted by computer to provide a mark out 40 for each paper (200 totals). The total scores were also calculated as percentages (Table 3). The points ticked by the students on the self-assessment checklists were analyzed as percentages (Table 3, the last column).

Table 3. The students' scores on the five FCE papers, analysis of the results as percentages, and analysis of the self-assessment checklists as percentages.

	FCE Use of Eng. (out of 40)	**FCE Reading (out of 40)**	**FCE Listening (out of 40)**	**FCE Speaking (out of 40)**	**FCE Writing (out of 40)**	**FCE Total (out of 200)**	**FCE Total (as percentages)**	**Self-assessment (as percentages)**
1	25	20.35	24	23.60	26.66	*119.61*	**58.80**	**95**
2	36	29.47	24	38	26.66	*154.13*	**77.06**	**76**
3	14.9	16.84	22.66	16	18.6	*89*	**44.05**	**67**
4	15	17.54	21.33	12	18.6	*84.47*	**42.23**	**86**
5	21.33	15.43	17.33	36	18.06	*108.69*	**54.34**	**76**
6	17.6	=====	26.66	16	10.6	*70.86*	**removed**	**removed**
7	24	14.73	17.33	8	16	*70.06*	**40.03**	**81**
8	27	21	17	12	16	*93*	**46.5**	**60**
9	18	9.12	17	14	13.3	*71.42*	**35.71**	**57**
10	21	14.73	24	14	13.3	*87.03*	**43.51**	**67**
11	34	23.15	30.66	35	29.33	*152.14*	**76.07**	**95**
12	23	21	28	32	21.33	*125.33*	**62.66**	**73**
13	31	29.57	29.33	38,1	26.66	*154.56*	**77.28**	**95**
14	17.6	23.15	20	22	21.33	*104.08*	**52.04**	**88**
15	25.6	25.26	20	14	21.33	*106.19*	**53.09**	**88**
16	18	21.05	13.3	8	16	*76.35*	**38.17**	**85**
17	15.4	7.01	25.33	10	13.3	*71.04*	**35.52**	**100**
18	26	23.85	22.66	32	13.3	*117.81*	**58.90**	**80**
19	27	23.85	-----	28	-----	-----	**removed**	**removed**
20	27.73	20.35	21.33	30	29.33	*128.74*	**64.37**	**76**
21	21	21	14.66	18	21.33	*95.99*	**47.99**	**95**
22	22	15.43	16	12	29.33	*94.76*	**47.38**	**100**
23	30.9	25.96	32	39.2	26.66	*154.72*	**77.36**	**98**
24	-----	16.54	6.66	10	-----	-----	**removed**	**removed**
25	23.46	22.45	25.33	28	21.33	*120.57*	**60.28**	**72**
26	15.46	19.64	21.3	10	18.6	*85*	**39,85**	**74**
27	28	31.57	25.33	36	29.33	*150.23*	**75.11**	**90**
28	30	24.56	22.6	23.60	21.33	*122.09*	**61.09**	**76**
29	30	32.98	29.33	30	26.66	*148.97*	**74.48**	**83**
30	32	23.85	28	26.40	29.33	*139.58*	**69.79**	**95**
31	26	25.26	20	29.20	29.33	*129.79*	**64.89**	**83**
32	28	17.54	24	23.40	21.33	*114.27*	**57.13**	**48**
33	28	23.15	18.66	23.40	21.33	*114.54*	**57.27**	**64**
34	23	25.26	21.33	24.20	24	*117.79*	**58.89**	**55**
35	32	18.94	13	22.20	18.6	*104.2*	**52.1**	**52**
36	-----	20.35	25.33	-----	16	-----	**removed**	**removed**
37	20	25.96	17.33	20.80	18.6	*102.69*	**51.34**	**92**
38	27	25.96	24	23.6	21.33	*121.89*	**60.94**	**95**
39	23	23.15	17.33	19.80	13.33	*96.58*	**48.29**	**62**
40	20	14.73	24	23.60	24	*106.33*	**53.16**	**76**
41	30	25.96	22.66	25.6	24	*128.22*	**64.11**	**45**
42	23	28.08	30.66	29.80	29.33	*140.87*	**70.43**	**93**
43	21	19.64	25.33	21.80	18.6	*106.37*	**53.18**	**60**
44	22	18.94	25.33	22	21.33	*109.6*	**54.8**	**67**
45	21	21.75	21.33	23.40	21.33	*108.81*	**54.40**	**69**
46	34	26.66	25.33	32	29.33	*147.32*	**73.66**	**76**
47	18	18.24	20	28	18.6	*102.84*	**51.42**	**62**
48	24	19.64	21.3	22.2	18.6	*105.74*	**52.87**	**76**
49	19	21.75	12	22.2	21.33	*96.28*	**48.14**	**79**
50	28	21.75	29.33	25.6	24	*128.68*	**64.34**	**57**
51	21	17.54	25.33	23.4	16	*103.27*	**51.63**	**69**
52	26	21.05	24	23.4	21.33	*115.78*	**57.89**	**59**
53	26	16.14	18.66	27.60	21.33	*109.73*	**54.86**	**64**
54	27	21.75	25.33	23.4	21.33	*118.81*	**59.40**	**59**

Correlations between the variables

A low correlation found between FCE and the self-assessment of the students (r=0.183; p>.01) means that these two variables are not related to one another (graph 1).



Graph 1. Degrees of correlations (n =50)

Conclusion

The data gathered by means of the classroom observations, the document analysis, and the interviews indicate that the activities used in the classrooms do not aim at preparing these particular learners under investigation to be aware of their needs and goals, or their strengths and weaknesses as learners. Although there are sufficient opportunities for group and pair work, most of the learner-centered activities specified in the observation form, particularly the ones that promote self directing and self evaluating abilities which can encourage use of the materials beyond the classroom are not used frequently and effectively. As a result, the students struggle, to some extent, to exploit the contexts available in their immediate environment to improve the language they have learnt in the courses. This may indicate that they fail in directing and monitoring their own learning. The correlation of around 0.183 between the self-assessment and FCE also confirms that their ability for reflection, one of the most prominent components of autonomous learning, needs improving (see Graph 1).

In summary, the data suggest that the students seem to be unable to identify what to master and how to master it for efficient language learning since they do not seem to have the capacity for reflection about how to monitor their learning process.

Suggestions

One of the main reasons considered antithetical to autonomous learning in this study is the traditional teaching and learning philosophy that the teachers have adopted despite awareness of autonomous learning. A possible reason for their reticence to cast off old teaching habits may be their beliefs about language teaching and learning acquired during their "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). Cotterall (1995) argues that such embedded beliefs are likely to reflect their readiness for autonomy. On account of this, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect to use the tools of autonomous learning effectively among teachers who have been shaped by this system. Since teachers play a key role in autonomous language learning, it may be more effective to target a gradual change in their beliefs and attitudes. For this purpose, we should conduct more comprehensive studies in similar teacher training institutions. Then, based on ensuing findings, a gradual change in the system that allows both the teachers and the student teachers to accustomize themselves to the new approaches, especially the use of self-assessment tools, may be a reasonable solution to facilitate and develop learner autonomy before bringing its assumptions and tools *en masse* into the system.

Railton and Watson (2005, p.192) likewise emphasize the significance of guidance in the autonomous learning process:

> "autonomous learning is as much a skill as learning to drive - it must be taught, it requires practice, and it is assessed against specific criteria. Unless they are taught, how to take the wheel for themselves, learner students, like learner drivers, may be at risk."

Indeed, if the teachers who are supposed to teach their students how to take the wheel are not good drivers themselves, the whole system will be at risk. In this respect, the most striking consequence of this situation might be that the student teachers in the study group will probably not be able to enable their future students to take responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, aiding those student teachers to engage in such an approach can have dual value, in that, in one sense, it may enhance their own self–governing capacity and then, in turn, contribute to higher achievement and motivation. Secondly, and perhaps most significantly, in the long-term it could have a worthwhile effect on development of autonomy among their future students.

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Assessing EAP Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning in the Australian context

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Bio Data

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of beliefs held by 262 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) language learners at an Australian University. The Horwitz' (1987) BALLI was used to collect data, which was later compared with an American study of 156 EAP learners (Siebert, 2003). Data analysis using frequency statistics shows that beliefs about language learning reported by both study groups were similar in all categories. It was concluded that despite a small number of inter-group differences, it seems premature to conclude that beliefs about language learning vary by contextual setting. Rather, they are due to the effects of individuals' complex metacognitive structure (as affected by a number of social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors) that is responsible for the nature and strength of these beliefs.

Key Words: learner beliefs, language learning, context

Introduction

In recent decades, research interest in second or foreign language learning has shifted from teacher-directed instruction to student-centered learning. Consequently, numerous studies have been conducted from the learners' perspective, and these perspectives have come to inform the field of language teaching pedagogy. Among these perspectives, are learners' beliefs about language learning, which are a result of a number of factors that shape one's thinking and belief formation, including past experiences, culture, context, and numerous personal factors (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Beliefs are defined as

"psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 1996, p.102), and said to act as strong filters of reality (Arnold, 1999).

In the context of second or foreign language learning, beliefs held by students can relate to, *inter alia*, the nature of the language under study, its relative difficulty, the usefulness of various learning strategies, the length of time it takes to acquire a foreign language, the existence of language aptitude, the effects of age and gender on second/foreign language acquisition, among others. Current literature suggests that these beliefs have the potential to influence the learners' attitudes to language and to learning, their motivation, and shape their experiences and actions in the classroom (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Consequently, they have the potential to either hinder or promote the learners' ultimate success in the acquisition of a new language and reduce the length of time committed to language learning.

Since learner beliefs have been found to bear significant influence on language learning and outcomes, one of the areas of current research interest lies in the factors that affect beliefs (e.g., individual learner differences [Siebert, 2003; Bernat, 2006] and contextual diversity [Rifkin, 2000; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003]). The current study is in response to calls from researchers (Rifkin, 2000; Tumposky, 1991; Benson & Lor, 1999; White, 1999; and Tanaka, 2000) to study beliefs across various contexts in order to establish their context specificity, among other factors likely to impact learner beliefs. Investigating the relationship of beliefs to other factors sheds light on their stability and malleability and thus bears consequences for possible instructional intervention methods in the classroom attempting to change those beliefs, which may hinder the learning process.

Background

The design of the Beliefs About Language Learning Instrument or BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) marked the inception of research on learner beliefs in various international contexts. The instrument is a 34-item Likert-type scale on which respondents mark the degree of

agreement or disagreement to each of the 34 statements. Questions of enquiry include learner's beliefs about the existence of aptitude, effective learning and communication strategies, the role of age and gender in language learning, the importance of vocabulary, grammar, and practice among others.

To gain a better understanding of learner beliefs and their role in language acquisition, researchers have investigated a number of variables in relation to these beliefs. Recent studies have examined learners' beliefs about language learning for their relationship to factors such as strategy use (Yang, 1999); anxiety (Tsai, 2004; Kunt, 1998; Banya & Chen, 1997); motivation (Kim-Yoon, 2000; Banya & Chen, 1997); learner autonomy (Cotterall, 1995; Wenden, 1991); attitude (Banya & Chen, 1997); achievement (Banya & Chen, 1997); gender (Bacon & Finnemann, 1992; Siebert, 2003; Banya & Chen, 1997), personality traits (Bernat, 2006); and language proficiency (Huang & Tsai, 2003; Peacock, 1998, 1999; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). These studies have produced important insights. For example, they found that learners who held unrealistic beliefs or misconceptions about language learning were more anxious than those who held more positive and realistic beliefs. Moreover, these beliefs have links to proficiency – the more proficient learners were, the more realistic and/or positive were the reported beliefs. Finally, statistically significant differences were found among some beliefs with respect to gender (Siebert, 2003).

The findings of Siebert's (2003) study are relevant to this study since student-BALLI responses are later used to compare data with the current study. The beliefs about language learning held by ESL students and teachers in an intensive English setting at institutions of higher education in the Northwest region of the US were investigated to explore similarities and differences, as well as the influence of national origin/ethnicity and gender on these beliefs. The Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz, 1985; 1987; 1988) and demographic questionnaires were administered to 181 participants: 156 students (91 males and 64 females) and 25 teachers. Students had an approximate TOEFL score of 425, and came from a variety of nationality backgrounds including Angola, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan,

Korea, Kuwait, Laos, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. BALLI findings obtained in a US context reveal that students generally recognize the existence of foreign language aptitude, place strong emphasis on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary acquisition, and report being highly motivated (for a detailed discussion see Results section). Siebert also noted that a number of student beliefs, such as those related to language learning methods, differed from those held by their teachers', and that this had significant pedagogical implications (Siebert, 2003).

With respect to gender, Siebert found a number of significant belief differences among males and females in relation to language learning and strategy use. For example, findings revealed that male students were more likely than female students to rate their abilities highly and more likely to respond that they have a special ability for learning languages, and were much more optimistic about the length of time it takes to learn a language. There were also other significant differences between males and females with respect to the importance of grammar, and practicing with cassettes, videotapes or computers.

In addition, Siebert noted that national origin or ethnicity does have an affect on students' beliefs about language learning, with some of the most striking difference found in the areas of ability, length of time it takes to learn a language, and the difficulty of the English language. For example, Middle Eastern students tended to underestimate the length of time it takes to learn a language and were more likely to believe that they have special language abilities. The opposite was found in Japanese students, for example. Siebert also reported a number of statistically significant differences among teachers' and learners' beliefs on 16 BALLI items.

Extending on previous BALLI research, Banya & Chen (1997) have conducted one of the more extensive studies on the relationship of beliefs about language learning and factors such as motivation, attitude, motivational intensity, strategy use, anxiety, and English achievement. Data from 224 Taiwanese EFL learners was collected for statistical

analysis, based on subjects' responses to i) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1987); Motivation/Attitude Inventory for English Learning (MAIEL) (Cheng, 1995); Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990); and, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Findings show that all abovementioned variables were influenced by students' beliefs, with attitude being the variable most greatly influenced by beliefs, while anxiety was negatively related to beliefs. In other words, students with positive beliefs about foreign language learning tend to have stronger motivation, hold favourable attitude and higher motivational intensity, use more strategies, are less anxious, and have better language achievement.

Other studies have focused on belief differences among and within various nationality groups. For example, Prudie, Hattie and Douglas (1996) found "clear differences" between Australian and Japanese High School students' conceptions of learning (p.25), while Tumposky (1991) compared the beliefs of Soviet and American students and found that "culture does contribute to the belief system… in ways which may relate to motivation and strategy selection, but may not be as potent as a force as other factors, such as previous experience or preferred [learning] style" (p.62). Truitt (1995) found that Korean university students studying English as a Foreign Language held different beliefs than those in Horwitz' (1987, 1988) original study of both Americans studying foreign languages and international students studying English in the U.S. The beliefs reported by Truitt's study were also different than those of other research (Park, 1995; Yang, 1992, 1999). Truitt interpreted these differences as possibly culturally based; though Horwitz (1999) concluded that it is premature to seek to explain inter-group belief differences in terms of culture, and that the differences likely reflect the relative status of language learning in the various countries and indicate that social, political, and economic forces can also influence learner beliefs. Further, she notes that if significant intra-group differences in beliefs exist, these could also be explained in terms of learning setting and individual characteristics.

Of particular interest to this paper are studies reporting context and setting specificity in relation to beliefs. Using the contextual approach, studies undertaken by Yang (1992), Cotterall (1995), Chawhan and Oliver (2000), and Kim-Yoon (2000) extended BALLI research into different contexts. Yang (1992) explored the beliefs of over 500 students in Taiwan; Cotterall (1995) examined almost 140 respondents in New Zealand; Chawhan and Oliver (2000) investigated the beliefs of 54 overseas learners in Australia, while Kim-Yoon (2000) identified the beliefs of 664 EFL learners in Korea. The findings of these studies suggested that learner beliefs about language learning are context-specific.

In a large-scale study, Rifkin (2000) investigated 1000 learners of 10 different languages at different levels of instruction in three different institutions, which has produced some significant findings. One of his three null hypotheses was that there is no relationship between beliefs about language learning and the nature of the institution. Among other variables, he had compared the learners' beliefs across three different institutions to see whether beliefs differed depending on the context of the institution (eg. large research institution and a small private college). Rifkin's study reported that, while there were numerous instances in which learners at research institutions held beliefs similar to those held by learners at the small private colleges, the statistical analysis found 21 instances in which learners of these different kinds of institutions held beliefs that were significantly different. This represents 66% of all the items in Horwitz' five categories. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Aims

The aim of the study was twofold. Firstly, to identify overall trends in beliefs about language learning held by 262 multi-ethnic background English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students at an Australian university, filling a gap in research on learner beliefs in the local context. Secondly, to establish whether beliefs are context-specific (at least to the extent where other variables are not considered), by comparing findings of the current study to a comparable US study conducted on 156 learners of multi-ethnic background in similar academic English programs in a tertiary context (study by Siebert, 2003).

Therefore, this study aims to test a hypothesis that 'the beliefs held by students in the Australian and American studies are context-specific'.

Methodology

Participants

For this study, participants were recruited on voluntary basis and introduced to it by being given a brief, informative oral overview of the nature and purpose of the study. The 262 participants represented both genders and were aged between 18 and 32 years of age. At the time of data collection, they were enrolled in various academic English courses for both undergraduate and postgraduate university entry. They represented nineteen different countries, Chinese (N=153) being the predominant nationality group. The study group also included 25 learners from Korea; 11 each from Japan, Thailand and Taiwan; 8 from Indonesia; 7 each from France and Hong Kong; 6 from Vietnam; 5 from Turkey; 4 from Columbia; 3 each from Mexico and Germany; 2 from Peru; and 1 each from Bangladesh, Chile, Iran, Burma, and Bosnia. The participants' overall TOEFL score was 570 or higher (equivalent to an overall IELTS score of 6.0 or higher).

Instrument

The survey instrument used in this study is the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987). It is a 34-item questionnaire, containing statements related to the following five areas: i) foreign language aptitude; ii) the difficulty of language learning; iii) the nature of language learning; iv) learning and communication strategies; and, v) motivation and expectations. Respondents are required to rate their agreement to each statement on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The statements on a Likert scale should be either expressing a positive/favorable or a negative/unfavorable attitude towards the object of interest. Although the Likert-scale was originally developed to measure attitudes, its scope has been extended to wider cognitive and affective variables, including beliefs.

While the BALLI is a widely used and recognized questionnaire in research on learner beliefs, it contains a prescriptive set of statements to which respondents mark their degree

of agreement. In addition, as with any survey instrument, there is a chance that respondents may misunderstand certain questionnaire items due to either their own limited language proficiency or the subjective nature of a questionnaire item (e.g., Item 15).

Procedure

As part of the procedure, data gathered from the anonymous participant surveys was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 11.5). Descriptive analysis in the form of percentages was computed. Results were later compared with those obtained by Siebert (2003) in a US study.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the ethnicity bias represented by the proportion of Chinese respondents (58%). Another is the imbalance of gender among respondents - there were 155 females and 107 males. It should also be noted, that data was obtained from learners at only one particular language school, at one particular university in Australia; and thus it may be possible that different outcomes may be produced by different population samples.

Finally, it is important to remember that, while a quantitative approach in research design is useful when large quantities of data are present, a construct as cognitively and affectively rich as one's belief system is difficult to capture by a set of responses to normative statements. Thus the beliefs about language learning held by the respondents are only those specified in the BALLI instrument.

Results

The results of the BALLI have produced some interesting findings, which give insight into the learners' beliefs about the nature of the English language including its difficulty, the existence of language aptitude, learning and communication strategies, and motivation to succeed. The findings are represented by frequency of responses in the

tables below. For the purposes of reporting the BALLI findings, student responses have been categorized into 5 areas based on Horwitz' (1987) taxonomy. Scales have been collapsed for ease of reporting (eg. Tumposky, 1991; Peacock, 1999; Tercanlioglu, 2005). Numerical data represented by frequencies has been rounded to the nearest whole.

Foreign Language Aptitude

BALLI items 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 16, 19, 30, 33 relate to the effects of age on FLA, general existence of specialized abilities for language learning, and beliefs about the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful language learners. Thus, these items address the issue of individual potential for achievement in language learning. With reference to age in BALLI Item 1, 92% of respondents in this study either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language", reflecting a popular belief that children are better language learners than adults. This finding closely compares with 82% reported in Siebert's study. Thus students hold beliefs consistent with research studies showing a positive effect of young age on – for example, phonological development (Patkowski, 1980; 1982; 1990); and fluency (Donato, Antonek & Tucker, 1996).

The respondents in this study also endorsed the concept of the existence of special abilities for foreign language learning. In Item 2, 88% indicated that some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages, though, in Item 16, only 22% agreed that *they* have this special ability. This is comparatively similar to Siebert's findings with 71% and 19% respectively. However, in the current study 32% of learners believed that they did *not* possess a special aptitude for foreign language learning, compared with only 6% in Siebert's study; and 83% (Item 33) believed that *everyone* can learn to speak a foreign language, with only 56% reported by Siebert. Whether language aptitude is culture or gender specific was addressed by Items 6 and 19 respectively. Here, 29% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that people from their country were good at learning foreign languages (Siebert's study reported 19%), though unlike in Siebert's study, the majority (55%) of respondents were uncertain. In terms of gender, 42% of learners

believed that women are better than men at learning foreign languages, compared with only 28% in Siebert's study. This might be explained by the almost reversed proportion of males to females in each study, with females representing a majority in this study and a minority in Siebert's (ie. the current study included 59% females and 41% males; Siebert study included 58% males and 42% females). It is therefore likely that respondents favored their own gender with respect to ability in language learning.

Further, with reference to the effects of intelligence on language learning (Item 30), the respondents were divided. Here, 45% of respondents believed that "people who speak more than one language are very intelligent", however 27% were uncertain of the effects of one's IQ on acquiring additional languages. While intelligence may be a strong factor when it comes to learning which involves language analysis and rule deducting, it may play a less important role in the classroom where the instruction focuses more on communication and interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). On this issue Siebert's study reported similar findings with 50% and 31% respectively. In Item 10, 34% were also uncertain if it is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.

Finally, 60% of respondents did not believe that being good at mathematics or science meant that one would not be good at learning foreign languages, suggesting that the majority of respondents do not make a distinction between an aptitude for the sciences versus an aptitude for the humanities-type subjects – a distinction put forward by Gardner (1983) in his Multiple Intelligence theory distinguishing linguistic intelligence from logical/mathematical intelligence. This finding is substantially different to Siebert's of only 16%.

Table 1
Foreign Language Aptitude
Frequencies of Response

Items			A	N	D
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a second language.	Aus.	92	3	5
		US	82	11	8
2.	Some people have a special ability for learning second language.	Aus.	88	8	4
		US	71	22	6
6.	People in my country are very good at learning second languages.	Aus.	29	56	15
		US	38	40	23
10.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	Aus.	52	34	15
		US	51	26	22
11.	People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	Aus.	13	27	60
		US	16	23	59
16.	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	Aus.	22	46	32
		US	19	52	29
19.	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	Aus.	42	28	30
		US	28	33	39
30.	People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	Aus.	44	27	28
		US	50	31	17
33.	Everyone can learn to speak a second language.	Aus.	84	8	9
		US	56	22	20

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. A=collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree; N= Neutral; D=collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Difficulty of Language Learning

BALLI items 3, 4, 15, 25, and 34 concern the general difficulty of learning a foreign language and the specific difficulty of the students' particular target language. Item 25 and 34 assesses the relative difficulty of different language skills, and Item 15 surveys student expectations of the length of time it takes to learn a foreign language. In Item 3, 67% of respondents believed that some languages are easier than others, though 15% did not make such a distinction. In terms of the difficulty of the English language in Item 4, 55% regarded English as a language of medium difficulty, though 33% believed it was either difficult or very difficult. Only 11% of respondents regarded English as an easy or very easy language to learn. This finding is similar to Siebert's with 49% regarding English as "medium difficult", 37% as either difficult or very difficult, and 13% as easy or very easy.

In Item 15, the issue of the length of time it would take to learn a foreign language well was a contentious one, with most respondents almost equally divided on the issue. Therefore, if someone spent 1 hour per day learning a language, 25% believed it would take one to two years to learn it, 29% believed it would take 3-5 years to learn it, and 21% believed it would take 4-10 years to learn it, while 19% believed that one cannot learn a new language by studying it for one hour a day. The disparity of responses could likely be explained by the subjective nature of the question, namely, that the question gives no other clues as to the learners' exposure to the language outside the '1-hour block', which could likely affect the rate of acquisition. Siebert's study reported an almost equal distribution of responses with respect to the length of time between 'less than a year' to '3-5 years' as the current study, however, more than twice as many students in the US than in Australia believed that it would take 5-10 years to learn L2, and twice as many believed that one cannot learn a foreign language by studying it for 1 hour a day. In other words, the learners studying English in Australia were much more optimistic about the length of time it takes to acquire a new language.

With respect to the difficulty of oral productive and aural receptive skills (Item 25), 30% of respondents believed that it is easier to speak than to understand a foreign language, however, 47% disagreed. A further 22% were uncertain whether speaking or listening for comprehension was easier. Siebert's study reported comparable findings, with a slightly greater number of respondents (31%) remaining uncertain. Similarly, in Item 34, 33% of respondents agreed that it is easier to read than write in a foreign language, however, 42% disagreed. A further 24% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Responses to this question were also similar to those reported by Siebert.

Table 2
Difficulty of Language Learning
Frequencies of Response

Items			A	N	D
3.	Some languages are easier than others.	Aus.	69	16	16
		US	65	17	17
4.	The English language is *	Aus.	33	56	11
		US	37	49	13

15.	If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak it very well?					
	- Less than 1 year	Aus.	5			
		US	9			
	- 1 to 2 years	Aus.	26			
		US	22			
	- 3 to 5 years	Aus.	30			
		US	29			
	- 5 to 10 years	Aus	21			
		US	48			
	You can't learn a language in 1 hour a day.	Aus.	20			
		US	40			
25.	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.			Aus.	31	22	47
				US	24	31	45
34.	It is easier to read than to write a foreign language.			Aus.	37	25	42
				US	38	28	32

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. A=collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree; N= Neutral; D=collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree. * A = A very difficult or difficult language; N = language of medium difficulty; D = A very easy or easy language. **

The Nature of Language Learning

BALLI items 8, 12, 17, 23, 27, and 28 include a broad range of issues related to the nature of the language learning process. BALLI items 8 and 12 referred to the role of cultural contact in language learning. Here 79%, compared with Siebert's 65% of respondents, believed that it is necessary to know the culture of the foreign language under study in order to speak the language, reflecting an understanding of the importance of gaining a linguistic pragmatic awareness for effective communication; and, in vain with Siebert's findings of 83%, 89% of respondents agreed with the statement that "It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country", recognizing the inherent value of learning language in an immersion-type setting, where there is a greater exposure to the foreign language, its culture and its people.

Next, Item 17 related to the importance of vocabulary learning when acquiring a new language. Forty-six percent of respondents in this study, and 57% in Siebert's, believed that learning new words is the *most important* part of language learning, while 31% (and Siebert, 29%) neither agreed nor disagreed on this issue, and 22% (and Siebert, 13%) disagreed with the statement. The results among respondents in both studies seem to

indicate a discrepancy in the learners' beliefs about the importance of vocabulary acquisition in relation to other factors in language learning. An even greater disagreement was noted in Item 23, where respondents were asked to rate the importance of learning grammar. Similarly to Siebert's finding of 39%, 31% agreed that the *most important* part of learning a foreign language was learning grammar, though a similar proportion of students (34%) disagreed (significantly less in Siebert's study, 15%). A further 36% and 35% were undecided respectively in both studies. These findings, which reflect an almost even distribution, may likely be due to a recent (more so for some regions of the world, less so for others) shift in language teaching methodologies worldwide. Some learners may be of the belief that the more traditional grammar based approach to foreign language learning is still more fruitful than the more contemporary communicative approaches, while others may have already embraced approaches with a lesser focus on form and rule learning, such as CLT.

Item 27 determines if the learner views language learning as different from other types of learning. Again, quite similar findings are reported in both studies. 60% of respondents here, and 54% in Siebert's study, disagreed that people who are good at academic subjects are not good at foreign languages; and, 27% and 20% respectively, neither agreed nor disagreed on the matter.

Finally, Item 28 asks learners whether they believe the *most important* part of learning English is learning to translate from the learners' own mother tongue. Responses indicate that 70% of learners do not believe translating to be a highly valued learning strategy, thus reflecting a departure from the grammar-translation methods in foreign language learning. This differs considerably from Siebert's findings with 52% reported. Further, a small minority in this study (11%), but almost a quarter of respondents in Siebert's (23%) had in fact emphasized translation as a very important part of language learning.

Table 3
The Nature of Language Learning
Frequencies of Response

Items			A	N	D
8.	It is necessary to learn about English-speaking cultures to speak English.	Aus.	79	11	10
		US	65	24	10
12.	It is best to learn English in an English-speaking country.	Aus.	89	7	4
		US	83	6	10
17.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words.	Aus.	46	31	23
		US	57	29	13
23.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.	Aus.	31	36	34
		US	39	35	25
27.	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	Aus.	57	20	24
		US	54	26	20
28.	The most important part of learning English is learning to translate from my own language.	Aus.	11	19	70
		US	23	25	52

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. A=collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree; N= Neutral; D=collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Learning and Communication Strategies

BALLI items 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, and 26 address learning and communication strategies and are probably the most directly related to a student's actual language learning practices. Items 18 and 26 refer to learning strategies, and items 7, 9, 13, and 14 concern communication strategies. First, with reference to 'traditional' learning strategies (Item 26), the majority of students, 60% (55% in Siebert's study), endorsed repetition and practice with cassettes/tapes or CD Roms, though 31% (30% respectively) neither agreed nor disagreed about their relative importance. This finding highlights the learners' perception of the importance of 'self-access learning' and the belief about autonomous learning - themes which have emerged in recent years in FLA and TESOL methodology literature (Benson & Voller, 1997). However, in Item 18, 91% (89% in Siebert's) of respondents agreed that it is "important to repeat and practice a lot". Interestingly, although 91% strongly endorsed the importance of oral practice, only 68% of respondents admitted that they enjoyed practicing English with the Australians they meet, while 27% were neutral. In comparison, a greater portion of learners enjoyed practicing English with native speakers in Siebert's US study (86%), and significantly less (7%) were neutral

about it. Apart from contextual factors (such as the degree of willingness of native speakers to engage in conversation with practicing foreign language learners, and/or their social openness to casual conversations with strangers in general) learners' inhibition to speak a foreign language may be explained by the learners' feeling of shyness (Item 21) in such situations. In fact, 30% of respondents (26% in Siebert's study) reported feeling shy in this situation, though 43%, and 19% respectively, did not. It is interesting to note, that although more than twice as many respondents in the Australian study reported *not* feeling shy about speaking with native speakers as did respondents in the American study, substantially less admitted that they actually enjoyed the experience.

Communicative apprehension, whether in L1 or L2, can be a result of a number of factors, including one's personality traits and states, such as introversion and anxiety. However, it is encouraging to find that 77% (and 74% in Siebert's study) believed that "It is OK to guess if you don't know a word English". It likely means that learners feel confident that they can work out the meaning of unfamiliar words form the context of the utterance or written text, and not feel anxious about having to understand each individual word. This skill is important for these learners in particular, due to the large volumes of reading for gist and listening to lecturers they encounter in their current EAP course and later on at university. Guessing the meaning of new words without having to over-rely on dictionaries is a useful skill. Dictionaries can be no doubt very useful, however, over-reliance can lead to over-dependence, and thus become a 'crutch' for the learner. Another encouraging finding is that, in line with current language teaching approaches, the focus of oral discourse is on meaning making and intelligibility over immediate grammatical correctness, where learners feel confident to speak before speaking 'perfectly correctly'.

Thus, in Item 9, 82% (and slightly less in Siebert's study, 74%) disagreed with the notion that one should *not* say anything in English until one can say it grammatically correctly. Nonetheless, 69% (and slightly more in Siebert's study, 77%) of respondents believed it is important to speak English with an "excellent pronunciation" (Item 7). These findings seem to suggest that learners view it more important to speak with an

excellent pronunciation rather than with grammatical correctness. With the emergence of English as an International Language (EIL), new developments in English language pedagogy have seen a shift from a focus on "excellent pronunciation" to intelligibility and communicative competence (or socio-pragmatic awareness). Finally, Item 22 assessed the learners' belief on whether one can 'unlearn' incorrectly acquired language forms. To the statement "If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on", 59% responded in disagreement, however 22% believed that if their mistakes were not corrected immediately, they might become 'fossilized'. In the American study, the figures are similar, with 46% and 22% respectively.

Table 4
Learning and Communication Strategies
Frequencies of Response

Items			A	N	D
7.	It is important to speak English with an excellent pronunciation.	Aus.	69	20	12
		US	77	14	9
9.	You shouldn't say anything in English until you can say it correctly.	Aus.	9	8	83
		US	13	13	73
13.	I enjoy practicing English [with the Australians I meet].*	Aus.	68	27	5
		US	86	7	7
14.	It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English.	Aus.	77	16	7
		US	74	13	13
18.	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	Aus.	92	6	3
		US	89	5	5
21.	I feel shy speaking English with other people.	Aus.	30	27	43
		US	26	28	46
22.	If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	Aus.	22	19	59
		US	22	31	46
26.	It is important to practice with cassettes/ tapes, or CD Roms.	Aus.	60	31	9
		US	55	30	14

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. A=collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree; N= Neutral; D=collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree. * Siebert study: ..[with people who speak English as a native language]

Motivation and Expectations

BALLI items 5, 20, 24, 29, 31, and 32 concern desires and opportunities the students associate with the learning of their target language. In this category, the vast majority of responses seem to reflect the learners' desire for and optimism in achieving their language learning goals. For example, in Item 31, 97% of respondents (and 94% reported by Siebert) agreed that they *want to* learn to speak English very well, and in Item 5, 88% (but slightly less in Siebert's study, 75%) believed that they *will* eventually speak English very well. In both studies, a small percentage (3% and 7% respectively) of learners did not believe in their ultimate success in learning English. In addition, 93% (and 85% in US study) believed that if they learn to speak English very well, they will have better job opportunities, reflecting the existence of instrumental motivation in both groups. However, integrative motivation was also evident from responses to Items 24 and 32, where 70% (and 73% respectively) of learners agreed that they would like to learn English to get to know and understand the natives better. Furthermore, in the Australian study, 70% of the EFL learners expressed the desire to get to know Australians better (Item 24) and 89% indicated that they wanted to have Australian friends (Item32). It is important to note, that Siebert's Items 24 & 32 ought to be compared with caution, since they were worded in a way that indicated a lesser affective involvement, and thus had an impact on the way participants in each study responded. Generally, these findings do not support Dornyei's (1990) argument that in EFL contexts, students are more instrumentally motivated than integratively. This is perhaps due to circumstances of the learners' current situation. As international students living abroad, the need to integrate with peers and become part of the local community is a necessary survival strategy for the duration of their study abroad, while learning EFL in one's home country would not make this aspect of any relevant importance.

Finally, in Item 20, 91% of respondents believed that their countrymen valued the ability to speak English highly. This finding may reflect the elevated status of English as a lingua franca around the world. With increasing globalization in commerce, science and technology, increased movement of capital, labor, and tourism, and its widespread use in media and entertainment, English has become the vehicle for international

communication. Hence, English is now an international language in much demand globally. With this in mind, it is worth noting, that Siebert did not ask her study participants about the English language in particular, but about foreign languages in general, which might explain the lower frequency score on agreement to this item (78%).

Table 5
Motivation and Expectations
Frequencies of Response

Items			A	N	D
5.	I believe I will learn to speak English very well.	Aus.	88	9	3
		US	75	17	7
20.	People in my country feel that it is important to speak [English].*	Aus.	91	5	4
		US	78	14	8
24.	I would like to learn English so that I can [get to know Australians better.]**	Aus.	70	24	7
		US	73	18	8
29.	If I learn to speak English very well, I will have better job opportunities.	Aus.	93	5	2
		US	85	7	6
31.	I want to learn to speak English very well.	Aus.	97	1	2
		US	94	1	4
32.	I would like to [have Australian friends].***	Aus.	89	9	2
		US	78	15	6

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and thus may not add up to 100. A=collapsed scores for Strongly Agree and Agree; N= Neutral; D=collapsed scores for Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Siebert study: *[foreign languages]; **[better understand people who speak English as a native language]; ***[get to know people who speak English as a native language].

In summary, the analysis of findings in this study has revealed many similar trends in learner beliefs, with only few significant discrepancies between EAP learners in the Australian and American contexts, despite a number of differences among both studies. For example, in Siebert's (2003) study, data was obtained from more than one higher educational institution, but only from one in the current study. Furthermore, participants' English language proficiency score (TOEFL) was lower in Siebert's study than in the current study (ie. 425 and 570 respectively). Also, while there was a significant nationality bias in the current study (58% Chinese origin), it is uncertain whether there was such bias in Siebert's study.

Overall, student responses regarding foreign language aptitude (Table 1) were all either similar or very similar. Both groups believed in child supremacy with respect to the

age factor, and both endorsed the concept of foreign language aptitude. However, they differed on the issue whether everyone can learn a foreign language.

With respect to the difficulty of language learning (Table 2), both Australian and American study participants held very similar views. Their estimates on the difficulty of the English language, as well as the length of time it takes to learn it, were very close, with the exception of the 5 -10 year period.

Next, the nature of language learning (Table 3) showed a number of close similarities. Both study groups agreed on the importance of vocabulary and grammar learning, with the exception of translation practice as a useful language learning strategy. Both believed that it is best to study a foreign language in the native country and become familiar with the native culture of that country.

Beliefs concerning learning and communication strategies (Table 4) in both studies were also similar. Both Australian and American study participants held very similar beliefs with respect to not speaking in a foreign language unless correctly, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words, the importance of practice in FL; and were similar in the areas of pronunciation, correction of errors, and practicing with audio equipment. However, the respondents differed in their reported degree of enjoyment in practicing English with native speakers.

Finally, student responses regarding their motivations and expectation for success (Table 5) showed marked similarities to items relating to personal motivation for learning English and their expectation for ultimate success. However, they differed in their degree of desire to get to know FL speakers better, and on the degree of importance given to the English (or a foreign) language among their countrymen.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the aims of the current study by firstly, identifying the overall trends of learner beliefs in the Australian context and discussing them in light of current literature, thus filling a gap in locally situated research. Analyses of learner beliefs are worthy of note for the light they shed on learners' thinking, expectations, and actions in the language-learning context. Secondly, the beliefs held by participants in the Australian and American studies have been assessed for their context specificity, and were found to be similar in all categories. Thus, the null hypothesis that 'the beliefs held by students in the Australian and American studies are context-specific' was rejected. Although there were a small number of items with a discrepancy rate on agreement above 10% between both study groups (Items 2, 5, 8, 13, 17, 19, 20, 28, 32), students differed markedly on only one item (Item 33), which had a discrepancy rate on agreement higher than 20%. Consequently, having rejected the null hypothesis, the paper remains cautious in claiming that any single factor is responsible for affecting learner beliefs, including context specificity (ie. contextual factors such as the nature and demographics of an institution). Beliefs about language learning are generally strongly held and difficult to change (Kern, 1995; Weinstein, 1994; Peacock, 2001) from context to context. It is argued, that it is rather the individuals' complex metacognitive structure, as affected by a number of social, cultural, contextual, cognitive, affective, and personal factors that is responsible for the shaping nature and strength of these beliefs.

Nonetheless, caution should be exercised in generalizing the current findings beyond this student population, or indeed to other wider populations. Accordingly, researchers could further investigate language learners' beliefs and their relationship to context and setting specificity, the impact of learner beliefs on learning practices; as well as other aspects such as malleability of beliefs, and their links to individual differences. There is also paucity in literature on the congruence of learner beliefs and their practices – an area of particular importance due to the possible effects 'cognitive dissonance' (dissonance between personal cognition, attitude or belief and behavior) can have on the individual's learning capacity.

On a pedagogical level, this paper supports the fundamental arguments raised by of previous researchers that understanding of learner beliefs can enhance the language learning process. Wenden (1986) suggested that classroom activities in which learners examine and evaluate their own beliefs may lead to increased awareness and modification of their expectations concerning language learning. Additionally, Horwitz (1987) reported on teachers' testimonies of how discussions at the beginning of an ESL course related to their beliefs and expectations helped to clear up some of their students' misconceptions about language learning, which – Horwitz notes – are often based on limited experience and knowledge. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that ESL teachers' consciousness of learners' beliefs and expectations "may contribute to a more conductive learning environment and to more effective learning" (Chawhan & Oliver, 2000:25). At the same time, Huang & Tsai (2003) point out that teachers might need to be very cautious about the use of teaching methods, which are crucial in affecting their students' language learning beliefs.

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Towards Better Grammar Instruction:
Bridging the Gap Between High School Textbooks and TOEIC

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Abstract

The authors of this study discuss ways to make the instruction of grammar more effective, especially for Japanese beginning level English students. In particular, they discuss what grammatical features and structures students should be aware of in order to both enhance their classroom learning and their ability to understand and respond to practical English expressions such those in the TOEIC test, which measure proficiency in international English communication. They (a) assess both grammatical features and structures of three high school English textbook series widely used in high-schools in Japan and those of test questions in the TOEIC reading sections; (b) uncover discrepancies that exist between those textbooks and TOEIC; (c) make suggestions about how to approach the instruction of grammar; and (d) report the results of their case study in which grammar instruction was given to beginning level university students in the suggested way.

1. Background

There has been a growing interest in and necessity for English for international communication, since English is increasingly becoming a lingua franca for international technology and communications. In secondary education in Japan, the development of English communicative proficiency has been particularly emphasized since the late 1980s (Ministry of Education, 1989, Ministry of Education, Culture, Spots, Science and Technology, 1999) in order to meet the needs of learners who want to be able to communicate in that language. Still, it is often charged that the current system of English

education does not satisfy such needs. Japanese university students' scores of the 2004 TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication)[1] serve to corroborate this charge. The TOEIC tests are designed to evaluate a learner's English ability for communication and their test materials are extracted from both everyday and business contexts. In 2004, 244,940 university students earned a score of 428 on average, out of a possible 990, at TOEIC IP tests (i.e., on-site testing of TOEIC) (TOEIC Un'ei Iinkai, 2005). When the scores are as low as they were in 2004, it can be taken to mean that despite the fact that Japanese students study English at junior and senior high schools for at least six years prior to university, they - on average - possess insufficient English communicative ability.

In this paper, we as grammar educators address the challenge of making grammar teaching more palatable and more effective. It is undeniable that most students of a second or foreign language view the study of grammar as tedious. English grammatical rules are intricate and beginning-level Japanese university students are weary of taking grammar classes with rote memorization and drills which they find both boring and difficult to understand or appreciate. In fact, in 2004, the university students' average score for the reading sections in TOEIC IP tests was as low as 243 out of possible 495 (TOEIC Un'ei Iinkai, 2005). Nevertheless, it is equally undeniable that an understanding of a language's grammar is essential. Communicative competence necessarily includes grammatical competence in addition to sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences (Canale and Swain, 1980). Just as vocabulary is the flesh of the language, grammar is the skeleton. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to explore the development of a better method for grammar instruction in which students are not just required to memorize difficult and intricate grammatical rules, but one that will effectively improve knowledge of English, as reflected in test scores of TOEIC reading sections, and ultimately, in communication.

To accomplish our purpose, we intend to address the general issue of *what* to teach, rather than *how*. Given the current circumstances surrounding English education in Japan as discussed above, we specifically focus on what students are taught at the secondary

level, what is expected in test questions used to evaluate a learner's English ability for communication such as in TOEIC, and how to bridge that gap. Specifically, the following four questions are addressed in this paper: (1) What is the scope of the grammar presented in the English textbooks traditionally used in the Japanese school system? (2) What kinds of grammatical features and structures frequently appear in both everyday and business contexts in TOEIC questions in the reading sections? (3) How effective are the English textbooks in preparing students to respond to these kinds of TOEIC questions? In other words, how does the grammar presented in the textbooks compare to the grammatical features and structures that frequently appear in those TOEIC questions? (4) How can the instruction of grammar be made more effective, particularly for beginning level students who have had little success in their traditional grammar classes, in order to improve their ability to respond to grammar questions such as in the TOEIC reading sections?

Before we begin, let us clarify another general issue related to our research questions, namely, the problem of *how* to increase students' grammatical competence. This has been a critically important as well as continuously controversial topic in the study of second language acquisition. Among various issues concerning this topic, efficiency of explicit and implicit grammar instruction of a second language has been extensively discussed. According to DeKeyser's (1995) definitions, explicit grammar instruction involves an explanation of a rule or request to focus on a grammatical feature in the input, whereas the implicit grammar instruction does not. Regarding the notion "explicit," several cognitive concepts have been discussed in the literature, such as "consciousness-raising" (Sharwood Smith, 1981 and Rutherford, 1987), "noticing" (Schmidt, 1990), "focus-on-form" (Long, 1991, 1996, and Lightbown and Spada, 1990), and so on. There have been classroom studies which emphasize the usefulness of grammar instruction that is explicit in some sense. To cite just a few examples, Takashima (1995) and Takashima and Ellis (1999) discuss a case study for English education at the Japanese university level and their work shows that explicit corrective feedback was effective in teaching past-tense morphology. Zhou (1991) also demonstrates that explicit formal instruction was helpful for Chinese students' learning of less complex syntactic structures and morphological

properties of passive construction. Examining the literature on this issue, Purpura (2004) concludes “In sum, the majority of studies surveyed showed a clear advantage for learners receiving explicit grammar instruction. Formal, explicit grammar instruction seemed to help L2 learners develop their interlanguage at a more rapid pace; it helped them achieve higher ultimate levels of grammatical ability;” (Purpura, 2004: 44).[2] In this paper, we proceed from the view that explicit grammar instruction is effective, and explore what kind of grammatical knowledge should be explicitly given to Japanese beginning-level university students.

2. Analysis of Grammatical Features and Structures in High School Textbooks and TOEIC Tests

In order to design a more effective grammar program, it was first important to know what grammatical structures are taught in Japanese school textbooks and to compare these with the structures that frequently appear in TOEIC tests. The first step was therefore to examine senior high school English textbooks to identify the grammatical features and structures that most students are assumed to have learned by the time they enter college, and to analyze the English language grammatical features and structures which frequently appear in sample TOEIC question sentences. Once obtained, these were compared to understand how adequately the texts prepare students to understand and use the English expressions found in the TOEIC.

2.1 High School Textbooks

Textbooks at the senior high school level are approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, and the grammatical features are strictly specified by school course guidelines, which are based on the *Gakkoo Eibumpoo*, (*School English Grammar*) (Murata, 1984). Of the texts that have been approved, the three top-selling textbook series were examined for this study: *Unicorn I* and *II* (Suenaga et al., 2002a, b); *Milestone I* and *II* (Shimada et al., 2002a, b); and *Polestar I* and *II* (Ishiguro et al., 2002a, b)[3]. In these particular textbooks, grammatical features are usually presented and explained at the end of each lesson. In order to ascertain how complete the

explanatory material was, the total number of lines that each text dedicated for explaining each grammatical feature was tallied. For example, the total number of lines *Unicorn I* devoted to an explanation for 'gerunds' is four: one line for a description of gerunds and three lines for examples indicating their use. See **Table 1** in 2.3.1 for a list of the grammatical units and their corresponding number of explanatory lines and percentages.

An analysis of the grammatical structures reveals that there is a characteristic peculiar to the grammatical framework found in these texts, and that is the classification of sentence patterns into the following five patterns (Onions, 1971): SV, SVC, SVO, SVOO, and SVOC (where S, V, O, and C stand for subjects, predicate verbs, objects, and complements, respectively). In addition, there are some exceptional constructions, which are grouped into *other sentence patterns*, such as "It-subject"; "S + *seem*, etc. + to-infinitive"; "S + V + O + to-infinitive"; etc. This analysis is discussed in detail in 2.3.

2.2 Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)

To identify the grammatical features frequently asked in TOEIC questions, the following eight sets of tests were examined: seven were retired tests (TOEIC Un'ei Iinkai, 1981 and 1982; the Chauncy Group International, 2000 and 2002; and the T.F. Communications 1997) and one was a practice test (the T.F. Communications 2003). We collected question sentences that required examinees to tap into their knowledge of English grammar, i.e., fill-in-the-blank and error recognition. To that end, question sentences in Parts VI and VII of the reading sections were used. A total of 480 question sentences were analyzed: 320 from Part VI and 160 from Part VII. In order to manage the results, identical terminology (e.g., "infinitives," "conjunctions," "adverbs," etc.) was used to describe the grammatical features from each source. For reliability, the classification process was repeated six times on different days by different researchers.

The procedure for classification was as follows: (1) We examined the grammatical features and structures involved in the process of making the correct choice of answers; (2) If more than one grammatical feature and/or structure appeared in one question, and if each was deemed relevant to the point of the question, then they were included in the

study and categorized into their corresponding grammatical feature and/or structure. Consider the following question as an example:

Sample 1. The increase in salaries and benefits ____ pleased all staff members.

(A) is (B) are (D) have (D) has

Four grammatical features and structures are pertinent to this question: auxiliary verbs, tense of verbs, passive voice, and subject-predicate agreement. In this case, the examinee must first recognize that the blank space must be filled by some auxiliary verb, and in order to choose the correct answer, the examinee must also possess a knowledge of tense, passive voice, and subject-predicate agreement. Therefore all four grammatical features and structures were included from this question sentence, because they were all relevant to the process of answering. Following this procedure for each question, we found - not surprisingly - that the total number of inclusions from the TOEIC exceeded the number of question sentences analyzed in this survey. In other words, each TOEIC question required a fairly comprehensive knowledge of grammar. The structures are listed in **Table 2** in 2.3.1.

There were several questions that could not be classified into any existing category. Such a question requires an examinee to employ some knowledge that is not conveyed in the explanation sections of the high school textbooks. Those questions were labeled as "none of the above." Consider this question as an example:

Sample 2. Most hotels offer many ____ tours.

(A) organize (B) organizer (C) organized D) organizationally

The answer to this question is *organized*, which is an adjective. At first glance the question might be assumed to pertain primarily to the usage of an adjective, i.e., how an adjective behaves grammatically. In fact, it inquires about what may come between a quantifier and a noun. Such a level of grammatical knowledge is not directly linked to the usage of an adjective, therefore, it was classified as "none of the above." It will be argued later that the concept of a 'phrase structure' plays an important role in this type of question. A detailed discussion follows in 2.3.2.

2.3 Results and Discussion

2.3.1 The Gap between High School Textbooks and TOEIC Tests

It is assumed in this study that the relative importance of each grammatical feature or structure that comes up during the teaching of high school grammar is equivalent to the amount of explanation allotted to each grammatical feature or structure within the high school textbooks. In the case of the TOEIC, this study assumes that the frequency of each grammatical feature or structure appearing in TOEIC test question sentences corresponds to its relative importance in understanding and correctly responding to practical English expressions. The quantitative results obtained by the analysis are summarized here as well as being displayed in table form (see **Table 1** and **Table 2**).

Result 1: The number of grammatical features and structures addressed in the high school textbooks is 24, with a total number of 1367 lines. Among these structures, the five sentence patterns (17.3%), relative conjunctions (15.3%), tense (8.7%), and infinitives (7.3%) are each given 100 lines or more of explanation. These five grammatical features and structures cover more than 50% of all the explanatory lines. In other words, in spite of the fact that 24 grammatical structures are covered in the texts, the emphasis is only primarily on these five grammatical features and structures.

Result 2: More importantly, 55.3% of the question sentences in Part VI and VII of the TOEIC tests fell into the “none of the above” category. In other words, more than half of the grammatical structures found in the TOEIC questions are not found in high school texts. Other grammatical features and structures which appear in the TOEIC samples analyzed are, for example, adverbs (6.5%), conjunctions (5.9%), prepositions (5.4%), passive voice (3.9%), and the five sentence patterns (3.9%).

It is clear that there is a profound difference between the grammatical features and structures taught by instructors using high school textbooks and those found in the TOEIC questions. Not only are the most frequently asked grammatical features or structures in the TOEIC tests *not* covered by high school textbook explanatory notes, but

the emphasis on the five sentence patterns taught in high school texts (17.3%) is clearly not as important in the real-life usage of the TOEIC (3.9%).

As we can see, the grammatical features and structures found in high school texts (**Table 1)** and TOEIC tests (**Table 2)** are significantly different. It is noteworthy that complex grammar structures such as relative conjunctions, infinitives, and participles are ranked within the top five in importance in high school texts, whereas simple categories such as adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions are ranked within the top five in importance in the everyday international communication proficiency of the TOEIC. In short, not only do high school textbooks *not* prepare students for the types of grammatical structures that frequently appear in TOEIC questions, but the grammatical features and structures that are so highly rated as to receive prominent coverage in the explanatory notes of the textbooks (other than sentence patterns) frequently do not appear in TOEIC questions at all.

Table 1 Grammatical Features and Structures Explained in Senior High School Texts

Rank	**Grammatical Features and Structures**	***Number of Lines***	**Ratio (%)**
1	Five Sentence Patterns	236	17.3
2	Relative Conjunction	209	15.3
3	Tense	119	8.7
4	Other Sentence Patterns	107	7.8
5	Infinitive	100	7.3
6	Participle	88	6.4
7	Subjunctive Mood	81	5.9
8	Passive Voice	74	5.4
9	Gerund	52	3.8
10	Phrase/Clause	36	2.6

11	Auxiliary	33	2.4
12	Comparative	28	2.0
13	Preposition	25	1.8
13	Formal Object	25	1.8
15	Concessive Construction	21	1.5
	"Other"[4] [each ratio of which is less than 1.5 %]	133	9.7
Total		**1367**	**100.0**[5]

Table 2 Grammatical Features and Structures Found in TOEIC Test Questions

Rank	**Grammatical Features and Structures**	**Number of Lines**	**Ratio (%)**
1	None of the Above	411	55.3
2	Adverb	48	6.5
3	Conjunction	44	5.9
4	Preposition	40	5.4
5	Passive Voice	29	3.9
5	Five Sentence Patterns	29	3.9
7	Phrase/Clause	18	2.4
8	Comparative	16	2.2
8	Infinitive	16	2.2
8	Relative Conjunction	16	2.2
8	Tense	16	2.2
12	Participle	14	1.9
	"Other"[6] [each ratio of which is less than 1.5 %]	45	6.0
Total		**741**	**100.0**

2.3.2 The Grammatical Structures Frequently Found in the TOEIC Questions

Let us now take a closer look at the type of TOEIC questions that fell into the category 'none of the above,' since this proved to be the largest category in the second formatted table (see **Table 2**). The information about the grammar applicable to these questions is, simply, not explicitly put forth in the explanatory notes in the three textbook series examined in this study. So, the question is: How, then, can students acquire this level of knowledge about English grammar?

The authors propose a new grammatical point of view that incorporates ‘sentence structure’ and ‘phrase structure.’ First, consider as an example the following TOEIC sample question of error recognition, in which the sentence structure itself is the target of question.

Sample 3. The copying machine that is located in the office on the basement floor.

A B C D

Crucial to being able to recognize the error in this sample is the knowledge of the subject-predicate relation, which is a key property of a sentence. Such knowledge allows the examinee to notice that the error is the existence of the word *that*, which is incorrectly placed between the subject and the main predicate of the sentence, thus preventing the establishment of the relation between the two. Since an examinee must know about this in order to recognize the error, it is imperative to address the subject-predicate relation in some noticeable way in classroom grammar instruction. (See Section 3 for pedagogical suggestions.) But in the examination of the high school textbooks, it was noted that the texts only briefly touched upon the relation between the subject and the predicate at the very beginning of introducing the notions of S, V, O, C, and M (modifier) (see 2.1).

The category ‘none of the above’ also includes questions concerning ‘phrase structure.’ Two types of phrase structure were frequently noted in this study: (1) a noun phrase (hereafter, NP) and (2) a verb phrase (hereafter, VP). Before studying the sample questions, it is helpful to review the meaning of ‘phrase’ and ‘phrase structure.’ A ‘phrase’ (or ‘constituent’) is roughly defined as a unit of grammar that when combined with other phrases can form a sentence.[7] There are two important aspects of this: (a) a sentence consists of phrases, and (b) a phrase has its own internal structure. Furthermore, it follows that a sentence made up of phrases has its own internal structure and is not just a random sequence of words arranged in accordance with the word-order rule specified for any given language.

Words can be grouped into a unit known as a phrase and these units can be built into a larger unit which has come to be known as a sentence. The idea that a sentence consists of different kinds of phrases is related to the teaching concept that the structure of a

sentence (as just briefly mentioned) consists of a subject phrase and a predicate phrase, both of which usually consist of an NP and a VP. TOEIC questions that include these two phrases (NP and VP) appear to be the most frequently occurring feature of grammar in the TOEIC and this is the reason that so many TOEIC sentences fell into the category 'none of the above.'

Because of the frequency of phrases in the TOEIC questions and therefore their relative importance, we next examined the way the concept of phrase structure functions in the TOEIC question sentences. Again, let us consider the same example that was presented earlier, and is repeated here:

Sample 4. Most hotels offer many ____ tours.

(A) organize (B) organizer (C) organized (D) organizationally

The answer is a certain adjective, and knowing that is linked to the knowledge of the structure of an NP where an adjective may appear between a determiner and a noun. Even if high school textbook grammar teaches that an adjective may be placed immediately before a noun, after an article, and so forth, how can a student figure out where to place it when the very position of the adjective is left blank in the question sentence? Knowledge about how to use adjectives does not automatically lead in a straightforward way to the answer of that type of question. And this type of question appears most frequently when compared with other questions concerning the other grammar features and structures. Another example question that involves the structure of a VP is shown below:

Sample 5. Some packing materials are ____ recycled.

(A) easy (B) ease (C) easily (D) easier

The answer is a certain adverb. It is taught that an adverb may be placed between an auxiliary verb and a main verb. Since the very position is left blank, in order to choose the correct answer, it is important to have a working knowledge about the unit of grammar that is made up of the core verb and the words that surround it, i.e., the VP.

Other than the three grammatical structures that have been discussed (the subject-predicate relation, the structure of an NP, and the structure of a VP), the 'none of the above' category includes two more grammatical features and structures: (1) the structure of a prepositional phrase (hereafter, PP) and (2) subject-predicate agreement. A third table was formatted, based on these considerations, and the 'none of the above' category was re-configured into the five new subcategories (see **Table 3**).

Table 3 Reclassification of 'None of the Above' in Table 2 for the TOEIC Test Questions

Rank	**Reclassification of 'None of the Above'**	**Number of Lines**	**Ratio (%)**
1	Structure of NP	181	24.4
2	Structure of VP	96	13.0
3	Subject-Predicate Relation	78	10.5
4	Structure of PP	39	5.3
5	Agreement	16	2.2
Total		**410**	**55.3**

The results of the survey that were summarized in Result 2 are, accordingly, revised in Result 3 below:

Result 3: The grammatical structures that frequently appear in TOEIC questions in Part VI and VII correspond to the structure of an NP (24.4%), the structure of a VP (13.0%), the structure of a PP (10.7%),[8] subject-predicate relations (10.5%), and adverbs (6.5%).

It is evident by now that students who are exposed mainly to the material covered by textbooks may find it difficult to apply their explicit knowledge of English grammar to the sentence questions that appear on TOEIC tests. This would bear out the opinions of many English teachers who, based on their teaching experience (Taniguchi, 1998; Tsuzuki, 2003), believe that to place great importance on the sentence patterns is not as

beneficial as expected when improvement in communicative proficiency is the students' major concern. Based on the results of this survey, the challenge becomes how to make the best use of the concepts of sentence structure and phrase structure in the classroom.

3. Pedagogical Implications

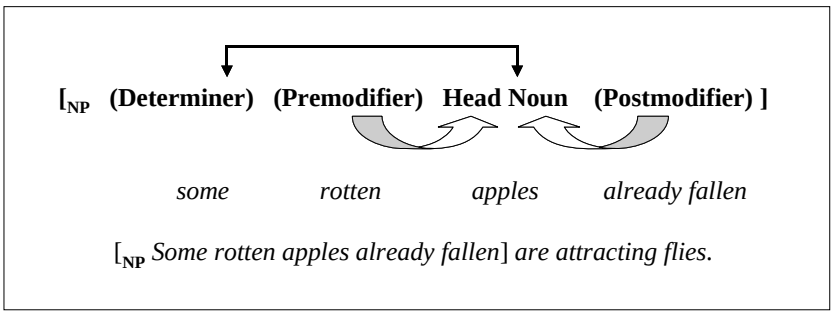
The concept of phrase structures as discussed in the previous subsection and the importance of introducing it in the classroom is not entirely new to English teachers in Japan. For example, in Kanatani (ed.) (1994), it is argued that understanding the notion of *ku* ('phrase') or *matomari* ('coherent syntactic unit') should be regarded as a basis of Japanese junior-high school students' English ability. Moreover, it is pointed out that students tend to have difficulty understanding phrase structures; for example, it is especially difficult for them to grasp the relation between a phrase and its post-modifier. For example, in the single phrase 'a book on the desk,' it is difficult to understand the grammatical relationship between the head noun ('book') and the prepositional phrase modifying it ('on the desk'). It is clear that Japanese students' high school English textbooks do not prepare them for these types of grammatical structures, and it may be that they are not addressed at all. It is also clear that these grammatical structures do appear on TOEIC tests. To bridge that gap, we have devised a method which does not require the memorization of phrase structure rules and regulations.

While some educators propose an inductive process in grammar learning is essential (Seliger, 1975), others advocate for a deductive approach (Shaffer, 1989). We believe that what Corder (1973) claimed more than thirty years ago might well be true: that it is most effective to use a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches. We use both as a basis for the suggested instruction outlined in this section.

3.1 Teaching Phrases with a Deductive Approach

When using this approach, in Step 1, the instructor gives the students a simple, clear explanation of the grammatical concepts of 'sentence' and 'phrase.' In Step 2, the students are presented with a generalized schema of the target structure by using a visual illustration such as a diagram with brackets and arrows, and so on (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1 Grammar illustration used in deductive approach



In this particular illustration, the parentheses are used to show those words which are optional. The two straight arrows and the line connecting them designate the connection between the *head* noun (which is the central word of the noun phrase) and the *determiner*. The curved arrows indicate the relation of modification between the head noun and the modifiers. There are two purposes for using an illustration such as this: (1) It is important to show as clearly as possible that the whole of a phrase is a coherent unit involving both obligatory and optional members of the phrase; and (2) it is necessary to show that elements within a phrase are grammatically related to one another, particularly with the head. The head determines the major properties of the phrase. In this example, the head noun forms a noun phrase.

In Step 3, the students are presented with basic example phrases that illustrate the generalized target structure. Example noun phrases that show variation derived from the basic phrase structure are listed below:

Sample 6. NP involving a quantifier: [many tickets]

Sample 7. NP involving a prepositional phrase: [the ticket to Boston]

Sample 8. NP involving an adjective: [a tall building]

Sample 9. NP involving an adjective phrase: [a building taller than ours]

Sample 10. NP involving a past participle: [the meeting held at City Hall]

To clarify the close connection between the head and the elements surrounding the head within a phrase, the following examples might be helpful for an *uncountable* head noun:

Sample 11. Uncountable noun without any determiner: [milk]

Sample 12. Uncountable noun with an indefinite singular determiner: *[a milk]

Sample 13. Uncountable noun with an indefinite quantitative determiner: [some milk]

Sample 14. Uncountable noun with a numeral determiner: *[two milks]

Sample 15. Countable noun with a numeral determiner: [two cups of milk]

The above examples of the deductive approach to teaching help students to grasp the general idea of a target phrase structure. Note the asterisk above demotes a non-grammatical structure.

3.2 Teaching Phrases with an Inductive Approach

Next, let's look at an inductive approach to teaching grammar. After providing the deductive method described above for the concept of a phrase structure and some simple examples, the addition of these exercises will help students to understand the targeted structure inductively. One activity students might undertake is this: students are required to underline the part of a sentence that corresponds to a targeted phrase. A sample exercise for a VP is shown below:

Sample 16. Underline each part corresponding to a verb phrase in the following sentences:

(i) The secretary <u>has already sent him the package</u>.

(ii) The announcement <u>said that the bus is delayed</u>.

(iii) I <u>am wondering if Mr. Smith will come</u>.

These are examples of (a) a VP with a ditransitive verb (taking both a direct and indirect object) in the present perfective and an adverb as in (i); (b) a VP with a transitive verb selecting a finite embedded clause as in the matrix clause in (ii); (c) a VP with a passive verb as in the embedded clause in (ii); (d) a VP with a transitive verb selecting an interrogative finite embedded clause as in the matrix clause in (iii); and (e) a VP with an auxiliary verb and an intransitive verb as in the embedded clause in (iii).

The exercises suggested here are intended to help students recognize the internal structure of a phrase. Repeating varieties of the target structure as many times as possible during this exercise is quite important, since the instruction does not rely on detailed descriptions, definitions, and/or explanations of the grammatical concept except for the very first stage of instruction (e.g., showing them a general schema of phrase structure). Students are expected to become aware, by themselves, of the existence of the structure and phrase in a sentence by being exposed to the various examples.

Instruction that is presented in this way helps students to understand that each example of a phrase is an instance of the general structure of the target phrase. The textbook explanations that address simple sentence patterns *do* provide appropriate analyses of those grammatical properties, albeit differently than presented here. However, it is the understanding of phrase structures and the direct link between sentence structures and phrases in the mind of the learner that is critical for understanding and responding to practical expressions, including applications for TOEIC (see discussion in 2.2). After receiving this type of grammar instruction, students should be able to integrate separate pieces of knowledge about different categories into a *unified* knowledge of phrase structure.

4. Case Study

We believe that explicitly introducing the basic concept of phrase structure (as described above) to beginning level students in the classroom is an effective way of bridging the gap between the curriculum content in high school texts and the grammatical features and structures of practical English expressions that are found in TOEIC questions. To test the validity of this hypothesis, we conducted a case study.

4.1 Teaching Procedures

Thirty-four Japanese college freshmen from an English communication class participated in the one semester (11-week) experiment. *Bridge to College English* (O'Brian, Mihara, Fukumoto, Muramatsu, & Kimura, 2003) was the textbook they used. The students met once each week for 90 minutes, and received a total of 16.5 hours of instruction. This

particular class was to be their *only* exposure to English instruction during this experiment.

Pre- and post-TOEIC tests were administered, with the pre-test establishing the students' existing English proficiency levels, and the post-test measuring the effectiveness of the grammar instruction in terms of an increase in scores. They took the pre-test during the first class in April, and the post-test in the final class in July. The same, second official TOEIC test (T. F. Communications, 1997) was utilized for both the pre- and post-tests. The test used was a retired test that had been made available to the public. Using the same test was reported not to have affected the end results, since correct answers were not given to the students at any time, and because there was a three month interval between the pre- and post-tests (Takahashi, Suzuki, & Takefuta, 2003; Chujo, Nishigaki, & Harada, 2004).[9]

The experimental grammar lessons were organized as follows: (1) Explanations of the targeted grammatical structures were presented in Japanese; (2) the students were assigned homework, which they were required to hand in at the next class meeting, in order to (i) ensure its completion and (ii) provide a way to give positive feedback; (3) fifteen practice questions from the grammar textbook (O'Brian et al., 2003), along with the correct answers and enhanced explanations, were selected from the previous weeks' homework and given to the students; (4) careful explanations about the structures of noun phrases and verb phrases were presented in diagrams on the blackboard (see Section 3) to supplement the related chapters of the textbook since the text provided no reference whatsoever to the sentence structure or phrase structure. The text generally followed the same grammatical framework of the high school textbooks examined in this study.

4.2 Results

The pre- and post-test scores are displayed (see **Table 4**) and are categorized as total scores, the scores for the listening section and those for the reading section. The post-test scores showed an average increase of 64.7 points ($t = 6.609^{**}$, $df = 33$, $p < 0.01$) - from 226.9 to 291.6 at the conclusion of this experiment. The result of the two-sample t-test

indicates that the increase between the pre- and post-test was statistically significant at the 1% level. Interestingly, the table also shows that not only the scores for the reading section but also those for the listening section had improved and that each increase was statistically significant at the 1% level.

Table 4 Pre- and Post- TOEIC Test Scores

	Total Score	**Listening Score**	**Reading Score**
Pre-test (April)	226.9	116.3	110.6
Post-test (July)	291.6	147.8	143.8
Difference	64.7	31.5	33.2
t	6.609**	5.796**	3.623**

** $p < .01$

The graphical view of the distribution of the TOEIC scores is shown in **Figure 2**. In the histogram, the length of the white and shaded bars shows, for each range, the number of students who gained the scores within that range. The white bars and the shaded bars represent the number of subjects in the pre-test distribution and those in the post-test distribution, respectively. Compared with the pre-test, the center of the post-test distribution is located in the higher scores. The chart shows that, apparently, the average score was improved because most of the subjects, not a limited part of the subjects, improved their scores. Therefore, we conclude (1) that the enhanced grammar instruction conducted in this case study was effective and (2) that it helped college students at the beginning level to improve their ability to communicate in the English language (as measured by the TOEIC scores) within a short period of time.

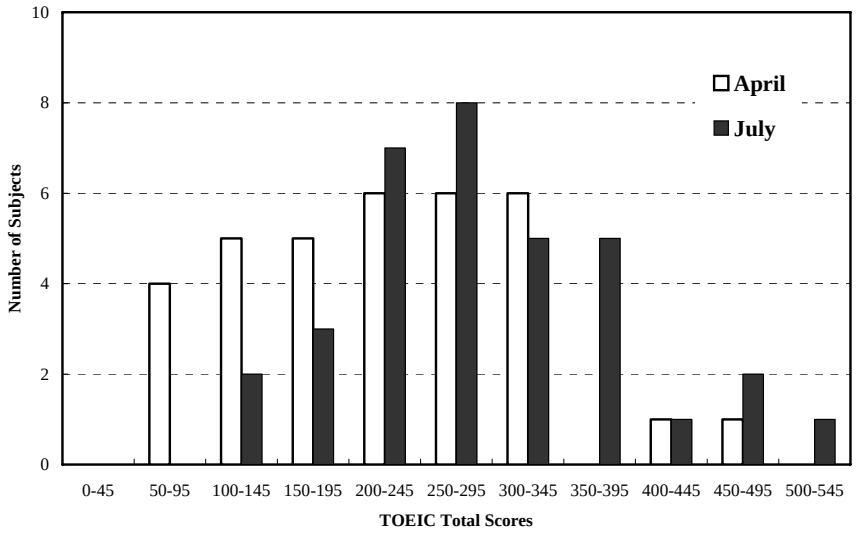


Figure 2 Differences between Pre- and Post-Scores

Moreover, according to our class evaluation questionnaire conducted in the final class, students indicated the instruction of the basic grammatical structures of English was appreciated and motivation for improvement on TOEIC scores was increased.

In order to establish that the results were derived from the grammar instruction as given in this case study rather than from other factors (e.g., that the students became familiar with the question format in TOEIC tests or that they had a strong incentive for raising TOEIC scores), we instructed a similar English communication freshmen class using traditional teaching methods (Uchibori & Chujo, 2005). The grammar instruction was conducted using the identical textbook and similar procedures as in the case study discussed in 4.1. The differences were (i) that the instructor did not provide the explanations about the structures of noun phrases and verb phrases, and (ii) that the instructor taught a supplementary vocabulary of 200 words which appeared frequently in TOEIC. The class was tested in the same manner as the present case study (see 4.2). In a comparison of the scores of these two case studies, the latter (which received traditional grammar instruction) showed little improvement. This result supports a validation of the effectiveness of the proposed method of grammar instruction, at least for beginning level students.

5. Conclusion

Most instruction and reference materials that concern the teaching of English grammar at the high school level in Japan are in accordance with the Education Ministry's school course guidelines. The instruction of grammar within such a framework is often criticized for its apparent failure to sufficiently develop students' abilities to communicate in practical English - abilities that are highly-rated by the current global business community. It is therefore essential to explore better grammar to improve communicative proficiency. The goal of increasing TOEIC scores is a measurable, concrete step in that direction.

This study demonstrates how such a problem could be addressed with an analytical study (a) of the grammatical explanations found in the senior high school textbooks that are widely used in Japan and (b) of the question sentences in the reading section of the TOEIC. In so doing, it was possible to determine which grammatical features and/or structures are essential for understanding the grammatical context of such questions. We have identified interesting patterns by studying the frequency of grammatical features and structures that, when compared, revealed discrepancies; i.e., that high school textbooks provided grammar explanations that produced knowledge that was generally not required for taking the TOEIC, and that those same texts provided insufficient and, sometimes, no explanations that produced knowledge for structures that are required. The most notable of these are phrase structures, because the TOEIC requires that examinees take a closer look at the basic structures of fundamental phrasal elements of a sentence.

Pedagogical suggestions include (a) providing students with a clear explanation of phrase structures and (b) allowing them to apply this knowledge to many examples. A case study was subsequently conducted to prove the usefulness of these techniques.

As an extension of this study, we are exploring the possibilities inherent in computer-assisted language learning (such as learner-centered interactive activities) and are developing e-learning materials that adapt the grammar instruction discussed here with an

eye to teaching beginning-level learners practical grammar in a more efficient way (Uchibori & Chujo, 2005). It is hoped that the approach to grammar instruction suggested in this paper will further contribute to the steady and effective improvement of English education.

Notes

1. While some educators may argue that a pencil and paper test is not effective at measuring communicative competence, the TOEIC remains the international standard. In addition, a significant number of Japanese students will take the TOEIC at some point in their academic lives, and TOEIC scores are used as criteria worldwide by institutions, companies and governments. For these reasons, it has been chosen as a measure of both grammatical and communicative competence for the purposes of this study.
2. See Krashen (1985) for the opposite view, which regards explicit input as peripheral and insignificant, but implicit comprehensible input as essential. See also Harley and Swain (1984) for a study against such a view, which points out that ample comprehensible input by itself is not sufficient as the only source of input to acquire the knowledge of the target language. For a detailed discussion of concepts such as implicit/explicit learning, consciousness-raising, noticing, and focus-on-form as well as relevant technical details, readers are referred to papers in Doughty and Long (eds.), (2003), Doughty and Williams (eds.), (1998), Ellis, N. (ed.), (1994), Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (eds), (1988) and Schmidt (ed.), (1995).
3. This study does not include the *Reading* and *Writing* textbooks belonging to the series, since an examination of 18 series or total of 54 copies which include *English I* and *II*, *Reading* and *Writing* showed that the grammatical explanation was given in the *I* and *II* textbooks.
4. The items classified here include: Inversion, Emphasis, Ellipsis, Adverb, Conjunction, Narrative, Sentence Type, Negation, and Inanimate subject.
5. In the tables, we showed each ratio to one decimal place. Accordingly, the total of the percentage appearing in the table amounts to approximately 100.0.

6. The items classified here include: Gerund, Sentence Type, Negation, *It*-Subject Construction, Concessive Construction, Inversion, Narrative, Emphasis, and Subjunctive Mood.

7. The definition of a phrase here differs significantly from the definition by *School English Grammar* (Murata, 1984).

8. This is the sum of the ratio of prepositions (5.4%) and that of the structure of PP (5.3%).

9. 100 questions from the listening section and 50 out of 100 questions from the reading section were used. The full score for the listening section and that for the reading section are 495 points and 450 points, respectively. The doubled number for the correct answers for the reading questions is converted into the corresponding score based on the conversion table given for this test. The split-half reliability estimate of the 50 questions in the reading section was .731.

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Book Review

Achieving Success in Second Language Acquisition
Betty Lou Leaver, Madeline Ehrman, and Boris Shekhtman
Cambridge University Press 2005. pp. 280.

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Many publications on second language acquisition (SLA) assume some prior knowledge about the complexities of SLA on the part of the reader. Leaver, Erham and Shektman extend this limited readership and make a significant contribution to the field by presenting core SLA knowledge in an accessible manner to undergraduates who have had little prior contact with the area. The primary objective of the book is to enable university students to achieve optimal success as language learners by raising their awareness of the role of language learning strategies and developing their strategic competence in using a second or foreign language. Its secondary objective is to equip second or foreign language teachers with the necessary knowledge needed to make informed choices about language teaching methodologies.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I Learning, Part II Language and Part III Independence. Part I serves the purpose of orienting the reader to the key variables attributable to success in learning. Chapters 1-5 are in Part I, chapters 6-8 are in Part II, and chapters 9-10 and an epilogue are in Part III.

In Part I, chapter 1 is comprehensive, relevant and practical, providing a clear orientation to the rest of the book. It explores the many reasons for learning a second or foreign language and aims to help readers understand the scope and requirements of language acquisition. It is also intended to raise readers' meta-cognitive awareness of language learning, thus guiding them to plan achievable goals. In chapter 2, key areas pertaining to both the cognitive and meta-cognitive roles in the learning process including cognition, memory, aptitude, and meta-cognition are succinctly outlined in a readable way. Chapter 3 is another readable section, describing learning styles and learning strategies. The relationship between these two constructs is clearly delineated and common taxonomies

of learning strategies are shown without overburdening readers with unnecessary details about the many classifications claimed to have been validated in the field. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the learner's feelings and personality in language learning. A variety of affective variables are presented including foreign language anxiety, test anxiety, motivation, self-efficacy, personality, ego boundaries, and defense mechanisms. One might think, however, that too many personality models are presented for a readership that has little background knowledge in SLA to fully understand and appreciate each model's applications to real life situations. Given this consideration, readers might benefit more from a focused discussion of a few key personality models. Chapter 5 is particularly approachable in that it explicates interpersonal dynamics in the learning process, describing student-student, teacher-student, and student-group relationships in the classroom. Undergraduate students should find these issues particularly relevant to their needs and experiences.

Part II presents the linguistic, socio-linguistic as well as para-linguistic aspects of SLA and provides a comprehensible and comprehensive introduction to language. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 describe verbal language, socio-linguistics and unspoken communication, respectively. Chapter 6 addresses verbal language from the perspectives of linguistic structure and pronunciation in language learning. To explain the nature of linguistic structure, this section uses examples drawn from other languages to enhance comprehensiveness. The examples used to illustrate the different parts of speech of the English language system, however, are rather decontextualized, which could pose some difficulty to undergraduates. The chapter also looks at strategies that help students develop their vocabulary reserve, thereby establishing a link with language learning strategies introduced earlier in the book. Chapter 7 introduces students to concepts of sociolinguistic competence, which play a key role in success in SLA. Chapter 8 discusses the kinds of communication that occur without words, including para-linguistics and cultural behaviours.

Part III is composed of chapters 9, 10 and an epilogue. The two chapters share the aim of helping students to take control of their learning, as success in SLA requires long term

commitment on the part of the learner. Chapter 9 covers cognition, affect and the teacher's role in self regulated learning from a theoretical perspective. This is complemented by chapter 10's practical approach towards enabling the learners to exert control over their spoken and written communication in a second or foreign language. Readers will find the practical suggestions and steps towards regulating control over one's use of a second or foreign language very helpful. The book concludes with an epilogue that aims to stretch the language potential of readers who want to move from high to near-native levels of foreign language proficiency.

In addition to the specific attributes of each section, all three have a few things in common. To enhance readability and facilitate students' understanding, for example, each chapter contains an overview section, covering several related topics. Each topic is then described in some detail, followed by a case study where a sample problem and solution are presented. The inclusion of a case study section is also commendable as it serves as a nexus of theory and practice and helps the reader to connect the two. This is particularly important for resources that aim to help students and practitioners grapple with the abstract nature of SLA. Also, at the end of each chapter, there is a review section with learning activities that students can carry out by themselves.

To conclude, the strength of the book lies with its accessible content and readable style and presentation. It should be noted that this is particularly important for university students who want to develop proficiency in a second or foreign language and to course instructors who need a course or a resource book that provides the foundational knowledge needed for SLA. To ensure target readers gain the maximum benefit from the book, however, a succinct justification for the selection of Learning, Language and Independence as the key components of the text could have been included. Notwithstanding this minor deficiency, the book is a thorough and practical guide to the field of SLA. Students and teachers who need to understand the means to achieve success in SLA will find the book both interesting and well worth reading.

Book Review

ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors
Edited By Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth
Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers Inc., 2004. Pp. vii +173

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In *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors,* Shanti Bruce and Ben Rafoth edit a collection of individually authored chapters from professionals in the field and contribute several of their own, each of which surveys everyday practical issues facing college writing center tutors who work with ESL writers.

ESL Writers is composed of fifteen chapters which are separated into three parts, Cultural Contexts, The ESL Tutoring Session, and A Broader View. Parts 1 and 3 provide context and perspective for many of the issues addressed in Part 2.

Part 1, composed of two chapters, helps tutors see "how working with ESL writers can be different than working with native speakers of English, and what challenges students must deal with as they strive to become proficient in English" (p. xiv). It does this by exploring the cultural differences faced by international students who come from countries where assumptions about writing, learning, research, and self expression can be extremely different from those at Western universities. Hayward in the first chapter, for example, emphasizes, "cultural expectations have everything to do with the success or failure of any tutoring session" (p. 1) and provides a checklist to help the tutor understand the ESL writer's culture. Tseng, in the second chapter, further helps the tutor by outlining major views on the L2 learning process to enable the reader to develop deep insights into different ways to help the ESL writer.

Part 2, the longest section of the book, focuses on a variety of issues with regards to the tutoring session itself. Chapters 3 through 6 offer suggestions about how to begin the tutoring session, choose the correct approach to read a student's paper, avoid

appropriation by finding the right balance between being helpful and assuming helplessness, and help ESL writers clarify their intended meaning while avoiding the temptation to leap to premature conclusions. Chapters 7 through 9 offer ideas on how to look at the whole text by going beyond word and sentence level concerns, help ESL writers learn to self edit, and tutor online. Chapters 10 through 12 provide a discussion on plagiarism by comparing the American academic rules for documenting sources to rules from other cultures and how to talk to the ESL writer about it, the limits of the tutors responsibilities, and ways to broaden the student's perspective by promoting creative writing.

Part 3 deals with broader issues such as the role of writing in higher education abroad, the difficulty of explaining English, and how ESL students perceive the writing center. The book concludes with a glossary which provides an easy way to follow definitions of language teaching terminology used in the text.

ESL Writers' comprehensive coverage of issues, its clear examples, and the fact that each chapter is self contained so readers are free to read linearly or choose the ones they need as a guide for specific tutoring issues makes this text a valuable reference for both tutors and the directors who work with them. Many readers, however, may see a weakness in the book because it only focuses on helping native speaking tutors without exploring non-native tutors' needs. Nevertheless, *ESL Writers*' insights and practical advice fills a much needed gap in the literature by helping native speaking tutors build meaningful and effective exchanges between themselves and ESL writers at campus writing centers.