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Foreword

Welcome to the June issue of 2009. The first part of this issue, containing three papers, is dedicated to L2 Listening. Our Associate Editor, Jeremy Cross, has taken on full editorial responsibilities for this section. The remaining six papers reflect the diversity of cultures and research processes that we publish in our standard quarterly issue.

L2 Listening – Foreword by Jeremy Cross

The past decade has seen increasing interest in L2 listening pedagogy and related research. Yet, as the small number of papers presented here reflect, the amount of research into this skill in the Asian context remains, comparatively speaking, rather low. Prior to introducing the papers, I would like to offer special thanks to Peter Burden, Maria Belén Diez-Bedmar and Afeefa Banu who provided peer reviews for papers submitted. The three papers cover a number of contemporary themes in L2 listening research.

Firstly, in *Engineering Lectures in a Second Language: What Factors Facilitate Students' Listening Comprehension?*, Lindsay Miller explores the perceptions, concerns, and preferred lecturer strategies of a group of Hong Kong, tertiary-level, engineering students who attend lectures given in English. Data from journals, focus groups and interviews, which formed part of a large-scale ethnographic study, was used to establish the dimensions which students mentioned as aiding their comprehension of lecture content. Miller categorizes these positive dimensions as primarily language-related or pedagogy-related, providing an informative and accessible account of students' interpretations of helpful features in their lectures in English. He also goes on to identify strategies lecturers can use to make their lectures easier to comprehend. As such, this paper offers useful insights into ways in which those teaching in the L2 in academic contexts may maximize students' listening comprehension of lecture content.

In the paper by Jeremy Cross entitled *Diagnosing the Process, Text, and Intrusion Problems Responsible for L2 Listeners' Decoding Errors*, a diagnostic approach is employed to determine the text, process, and intrusion problems potentially to blame for decoding errors identified in the written extended responses of Japanese EFL learners who

listened to segments of authentic news videotext. Cross orients his study more towards the kind of procedure that can be exploited in the classroom rather than relying on the psycholinguistic laboratory methods often utilized to explore learners' decoding processes or problems. The difficulty of attributing decoding errors to one problem source are illustrated in Cross's discussion through the use of examples of common issues encountered by the learners, which were evident in their written responses. Findings revealed learners struggled with cliticisation and resyllabification, phoneme discrimination, and poorly conceived word choices. The paper suggests initial remedial pedagogical interventions, which were derived from the given data analysis, to address these aspects.

The third paper by Ai-hua Chen, *Listening Strategy Instruction: Exploring Taiwanese College Students' Strategy Development*, reports on a study of the effects of a 14-week listening course for beginner to low-intermediate EFL students which included a strategy training component. Entries from reflective journals the students completed at three stages of the instruction provided the raw data for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of students' strategy development as the listening course progressed. The journals also acted to mediate their strategy learning in support of the classroom input (along with a task checklist). Chen's quantitative findings for the complete cohort and for groups of students at three levels of proficiency illustrate an increase in the reporting of metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Excerpts from students' reflective journals also provide a qualitative perspective on the nature of students' strategy use at the different proficiency levels. Although it is important to be cautious about the extent of claims which can be made based on using only one mode of data collection, Chen's use of reflective journals illustrates their potential for gaining insights into the utility of listening courses aimed at promoting learners' strategic awareness and control, as well as for complementing those interventions. Of course, though not addressed in this study, it remains to be seen whether strategy instruction actually leads to gains in listening comprehension ability, particularly as establishing such a cause-effect relationship remains problematic.

Foreword – Roger Nunn

In *Plagiarism by Turkish Students: Causes and Solutions*, Odiléa Rocha Erkaya addresses an issue that affects all of us whether as article reviewers or teachers. Using semi-structured interviews, Erkaya attempts to identify causes of plagiarism among Turkish students and

propose possible solutions. The two most prevalent causes of plagiarism identified among the students interviewed were lack of awareness about plagiarism and lack of knowledge about writing research papers. The students appear to direct responsibility towards teachers, claiming that they were taught neither what plagiarism meant nor how to develop and structure a research paper. Lack of motivation to do research, lack of freedom to express their opinions or use their own voices, and negative attitude towards writing were other reasons cited. Some of Erkaya's suggestions include informing students about available software and search engines that detect plagiarism and encouraging students to choose interesting current topics for their research papers. My own suggestion is to be fully involved in the early drafting of students' writing process in classroom session. Students' work in process is displayed and discussed in class.

Esmael Abdollahzadeh (*The Effect of Rhetorical and Cognitive Structure of Texts on Reading Comprehension*) examines the comprehension of different text types by readers at different proficiency levels. The finding that more proficient readers outperform lower level groups in expository and argumentative text comprehension may seem obvious but the importance of the finding is that it provided evidence that certain text types are more difficult for lower-level underachievers. Abdollahzadeh concludes that certain levels of proficiency need to be achieved before these text types can be usefully exploited.

In *Promoting Self-assessment Strategies: An Electronic Portfolio Approach* Shao-Ting Hung, proposes electronic portfolios as an effective means for learners to monitor their own writing process and to practise a variety of writing strategies at the same time. This study investigates the value of self-assessment by EFL learners. The findings revealed that while self-assessment practices encouraged strategy use and self-directed language learning, involving students in their own grading also raises difficulties that need to be addressed.

Kok Eng Tan, Abdul Rashid Mohamed and Kim Guan Saw (*Improving school English in Malaysia through Participation in Online Threaded Discussion Groups*) exploit the fact that online communication has become an integral part of the daily lives of many Malaysian adolescents. In their qualitative study of the writing in English by a group of year 10 students they describe some characteristics of the interaction of a group of adolescent boys in an online 'threaded' discussion group, identifying a set of ground rules that were observed to sustain discussion. The paper suggests how the daily practice of students can be put to use by teachers to improve school English.

In *Teacher-Student Relationship and the Conceptualization of the “Good Language Teacher”*: *Does Culture Matter?*, Larisa Nikitina and Fumitaka Furuoka raise an important issue that an international journal would clearly wish to address. Their study considers the preferred qualities of the language teacher as perceived by a cohort of Malaysian university students. While their quantitative analysis appears to indicate that teacher-student relationships are built along clearly identifiable dimensions, qualitative analysis suggests the students’ perceptions may be less culturally bound than the quantitative results indicate, a finding which might lead us to consider the validity of approaches for this kind of study.

Finally, in *Analysis of Communication Strategies used by Freshman Active English Students using YackPack or Homework-based Speaking Tasks*, Samuel Andrew Meyerhoff analyzes the progress of speaking ability in “Active English (AE) students”. He considers both quantity (speech rate, lexical density, etc.) and quality (lexical and grammatical accuracy) of speech, as well as the implementation of communication strategies. His preliminary findings challenge some current assumptions highlighting the need for further research into the roles of planned and unplanned speech on EFL language development.

Engineering Lectures in a Second Language: What Factors Facilitate Students' Listening Comprehension?

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Bio Data:

Dr. Lindsay Miller is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics in the English Department at City University of Hong Kong. He mostly teaches on BA and MA courses in English for Specific Purposes. His research interests are in learner autonomy and academic listening. He is co-author of *Establishing Self-access: From Theory to Practice* (with D. Gardner), and *Second Language Listening: Theory to Practice* (with J. Flowerdew), both published by Cambridge University Press.

Abstract

This paper presents data from a large-scale ethnographic study into the perceptions, concerns, and preferred lecturer strategies of one group of Hong Kong second-language (L2) engineering students who were attending lectures given in English. Although such investigations often focus purely on the 'problem' dimensions students have when listening to lectures, there are aspects to the lecture event which students identify as aiding their listening comprehension. These positive dimensions of lectures are the focus of this paper, and were identified using journals, interviews, and focus groups, and categorized under language features and pedagogical features. The data presented also suggests that lecturers need to adopt specific lecturing strategies in order to make the content materials more accessible to this type of student.

Keywords: listening, lectures, ethnography, engineering L2 students.

Introduction

The number of L2 English speakers attending universities in English-speaking countries, and in non-English speaking countries, continues to rise (Wilkinson, 2005). Europe, in particular, has seen a dramatic increase in the number of universities offering programmes and courses taught in English, as has Asia, and Africa (Coleman, 2006). In fact, the use of English as the medium of instruction in universities is now a major global phenomenon (Graddol, 1997), and "... in 2003-04 an estimated 1500 Master's programmes were offered in English in countries where English is not the first language." (Graddol, 2006, p. 74).

Universities in South East Asia now offer more of their programmes and courses in

English (Newsweek, 2007). In contexts where English operates as a second language, e.g., Singapore, most of the preparatory work is done at secondary school level, while in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations, such as Thailand, universities often have dedicated English Language Units which conduct year-long English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to upgrade the students' proficiency levels. However, preparing students for English medium education is not an easy task, and recently there have been a number of conferences and symposiums which have focussed on this issue and how universities use English as a teaching medium (Language Issues in English-medium Universities across Asia Symposium, 2006, and The 5th Asia TEFL International Conference, 2007).

In Hong Kong, the focus of the present study, the number of students attending tertiary education rose from 2% in 1980 to 18% by 1997 (Howett, 1997), and has continued to rise with the introduction of a number of new initiatives, such as self-financing programmes, from 2000 onwards. By 2006, the percentage of 17-20 year-olds with access to post-secondary education had risen to 66% (Olsen & Burges, 2007). This dramatic increase is in line with the administration's stated policy on access to education in the 2000 policy address by the then Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administration Region, Tung Chee-hwa (Policy Address, 2000).

The majority of tertiary institutes in Hong Kong operate an English medium policy, which, in the past, when the student intake focused on only admitting the elite students who had good command of English, posed few or no problems. However, nowadays, with the dramatic increase of students into universities, lecturers and students have found more difficulties in operating in their discipline specific lectures in English.

Transactional listening, that is listening to stretches of spoken texts to gain information, such as with listening to lectures, can be a difficult enough task in one's first language, but when students have to try and follow such structured discourse in a second language, the task can become overwhelming to the point that little or no benefit is derived from the activity. Students who have to comprehend complex information in a second language have, potentially, additional barriers to overcome in the lecture hall, e.g., complex information plus unfamiliar language terms. Therefore, both students and their lecturers need to consider how listening comprehension can be sustained, if not improved. Lectures need to be interesting to all students in order to maintain their motivation levels, and they also need to

be accessible to L2 students in order to maintain their concentration levels. When L2 groups of learners attend lectures, the lecturer has to be more aware of the audiences' needs and perhaps make more allowances in the ways in which information is presented to such students. In order to assist lecturers to deliver their lectures, and L2 students to comprehend the lectures they attend given in English, research into what aids listening comprehension in a second language is important. Such research may give us insights into the processes students use when listening to lectures, and when such information is made available to lecturers it may aid them in delivering their content material more effectively to their students.

Second language listening research

Approaches

Research into L2 listening has been undertaken in four main ways: 1) a measuring approach whereby psychometric research tools are used to measure speech rates or listening comprehension (e.g., Jackson & Bilton, 1994; Field, 2008); 2) a discourse analysis approach where researchers analyze speech from a purely linguistic perspective (e.g., Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Fortanet, 2005); 3) a strategy method where specific listening strategies learners have, or can develop, are identified (e.g., Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghadtari, 2006; Graham, Santos, & Vanderplank 2008); and 4) ethnographic investigations, where the researcher tries to uncover the perceptions about listening from a socially constructed perspective (e.g., Benson, 1989; Northcott, 2001). Each of these approaches adds to our understanding of what happens when listening in English.

Academic listening

In the specific area of academic listening, a series of studies which report on students perceptions, problems, and strategies when attending lectures in an L2 have been carried out by Flowerdew and Miller (1992, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997), Flowerdew, Li, and Miller (1998), and Flowerdew, Miller, and Li (2000). The approach used in these studies is ethnographic in nature with multiple research tools, such as interviews, observations, dairies, employed to gather and triangulate the data. The base data from these studies is a useful starting point for any other ethnographic investigations into lecture comprehension.

The students in Flowerdew and Miller's studies were from a variety of disciplines and the

results were described in general terms. Apart from setting a base-line of the perceptions, problems and strategies Chinese learners have when attending lectures, these studies also highlight the different dimensions there are to lecturing in a second language. These dimensions are *ethnic* – the difficulties a lecturer from one ethnic background has when presenting lectures to students from a different cultural background; *local* – when aspects of the local setting assist students to comprehend the lecture content; *academic* – which refers to practices peculiar to educational institutions, e.g., teacher-centred instruction vs. student-centred learning; and *disciplinary* – the realization that each discipline has specialized vocabulary and specific ways of presenting information.

In the same series of studies, Flowerdew and Miller also identify the sociocultural features of lectures in a second language. Briefly, they identified six such features, namely, 1) *purpose of lectures* – lecturers saw lectures as central to learning whereas students saw them as auxiliary to their learning; 2) *roles of lecturers* – a variety of roles of the lecturer were identified, e.g., prioritiser of information, facilitator, and language teacher; 3) *styles of lecturing* – lecturers were often not prepared to adapt their lecturing style to suit the learners, and students were often not prepared for participatory styles of lecturing; 4) *simplification* – lecturers reported trying to slow down their speech, avoiding the use of complex or unusual words, and repeating themselves more. Students also reported that these strategies helped them comprehend the lecture better; 5) *listener behaviour* – lecturers complained about the amount of noise students generated in their lectures, but students reported that they had to check their comprehension with their classmates from time-to-time; and 6) *humour* – which was reported by all foreign lecturers as causing problems in their lectures, i.e., they were not able to use humour effectively because of cultural, and/or linguistic, barriers.

First-language engineering students studying in their mother tongue (English) encounter communication problems (Nichols, 1999), and so it is perhaps not surprising to find documented cases where L2 engineering students have problems when studying in English. Since Olsen and Huckin's 1990 study about the language problems L2 engineering students had, there have been many other articles describing similar situations, (e.g., Vinke & Jochem, 1993; Dłaska, 1999; and Shin, 2008).

In Olsen and Huckin's (1990) study of twelve non-native English speaking engineering and physics students who were presented with a 16-minute English language videotape of an authentic lecture on a topic of mechanical engineering, the researchers found that even when

these students were able to comprehend all the lexis and discourse markers of the lecture, they were still unable to understand the main points. In a similar way, Vinke and Jochem's (1993) study of Indonesian engineering students' abilities to follow their lectures in English found that, even when these students had high TOEFL scores, they still had difficulties in comprehending their lectures. In a study examining the issue from a different second language perspective, Dłaska (1999) investigated the problems English-speaking students have when attempting to follow lectures in German. Dłaska maintained that, even with high general proficiency levels in German, many of these students had difficulties in comprehending their content specific lectures in engineering when they were delivered in a second language. Dłaska also stated there was a need for more Languages for Specific Purposes courses to help such students. In a more recent study, Shin (2008) investigated the skills which Korean postgraduate students of engineering require to follow their courses at a British university. Shin suggested that, even after being admitted onto a post-graduate course, these students were ill prepared for the participatory nature of their lectures, and required more training in how to deal with discipline-specific literacy.

Each of the above studies indicate that even when students have high proficiency levels in their second language they still encounter comprehension problems when listening to lectures in the second language. The question guiding the present study, therefore, was: How do low-language proficiency learners manage when listening to lectures in a second language?

In order to further the research agenda into how L2 engineering students cope with their lectures in English and try and understand what some of the issues are for these students, an ethnographic case study was undertaken with a group of Hong Kong first-year students. In this paper, features of the lectures which led to better comprehension are described. By understanding what aids our students in comprehending their lectures in English, we are able to develop a picture of the type of strategies students might prefer their lecturers to use. Such information can then act as a guide by which to measure our own teaching, or perhaps act as a basis for lecturer training sessions. The findings from this study are therefore useful to inform, or improve, lecturer strategy training – an area of university work which is not often taken seriously, and is sometimes completely neglected.

Methodology

The data reported on in this article is based on an ethnographic case study (Yin, 1994). The students who took part were recruited from an opportunistic group (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and no pre-selection was done by the researcher. However, the sample was ‘purposive’ (Kuzel, 1992) in that the criteria for selection of the participants in the study were predetermined on the basis of the typical background characteristics of the students who had gained entry to the engineering programme at a local English-medium university in Hong Kong. The students reported on here were all members of one tutorial class. This was a homogenous group of seventeen male students, ranging in age from nineteen to twenty-four. All spoke Cantonese as their first language, and all had attained their primary and secondary school education in Hong Kong. Most of the students in this group rated their English language proficiency as ‘very weak’ or ‘weak’ (n = 10), six rated their English as ‘good’ and only one student rated his language proficiency as ‘very good’. During their first year at university these students had to attend 10 hours of engineering lectures in English each week. They had nine different lecturers: 4 Hong Kong Chinese; 2 Indian; 1 British; 2 Mainland Chinese.

In this study a variety of qualitative research instruments were used to collect unstructured data from the engineering students and their lecturers. The research instruments used in the complete study were: Focus Group Interviews; Students’ Journals; Researcher’s Journal; Questionnaires; Participant Observations; Lecturer Recordings; Life History Interviews; Lecturer Interviews; Student Interviews; Participant Verification. For the purposes of this paper the following research instruments are reported on: Students’ Journals (J); Focus Groups (FG); In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews (I); and Life Histories Interviews (LH). A summary of the research instruments and the quantity of data obtained is presented in Table 1.

Research instrument	Quantity of data
Journals	170 student journal entries (17 student diaries with 10 entries in each)
Focus Groups	40 hours of audio-taped and video-taped focus group activities
In-depth semi-structured interviews	20-30 minute interviews with each student
Life History interviews	17 Life History interviews (approximately 7 hours of audio-taped interviews)

Table 1: Quantity of data collected using the various research instruments

Journals

Each Student Participant (SP) was given a notebook at the beginning of the research project. Then, the researcher asked the SPs to record one entry each week for 10 weeks in their journals. As the researcher was also the class teacher for the English course the SPs were taking, it was easy for him to remind SPs to complete their journals. Each week some different areas of interest were highlighted by the researcher, and SPs were asked to reflect on this and write their comments. The journals were dialogic. That is, the researcher read each comment and, when appropriate, wrote a comment or question in an effort to elicit further comments by the SPs. The type of questions SPs were asked to respond to were:

- What do you do if you do not know a word(s) when listening to something in a lecture?
- Can you describe a situation when you were listening to a lecture and did not understand something? What did you do?
- What types of things affect your listening in lectures?
- What strategies do you use when listening to a lecture?

Focus groups

In groups of four, SPs twice met with the researcher to conduct focus group sessions. The researcher acted as a facilitator, and mentioned some comments which the SPs had written in their journals, or he had observed in lectures. SPs were then encouraged to discuss the issues. For instance, “Someone mentioned that during last week’s lecture there was a lot of chatting going on while the lecturer was giving the lecture. What do you think about that?” All focus groups sessions were audio and video recorded and the texts were later transcribed.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

SPs were invited to a short individual interview with the researcher. These interviews lasted between 20-30 minutes and were designed to give each student further opportunities to elaborate on journal entries they had made, or issues which had been discussed during the focus group sessions.

Life History interviews

Each SP was invited to have a focused Life History interview with the researcher. In these sessions, the researcher went beyond the lecture context and discussed general issues about language learning with the SP. The SPs were frank about the problems they had experienced in learning English, and how this might affect their learning at university.

The main data collection period was conducted during the students' first year at university, a period when they may have more difficulties in coping with their English-medium lectures. However, contact was maintained between the students and the researcher for the full three years of the students' degree program, for further data collection, and verification of the interpretation of the data.

Each of the research instrument tools in Table 1 was piloted prior to use with the SPs in the study. Once the data had been collected it was transcribed and loaded onto a computer software program (NUD*IST Vivo, Version II). This program is designed to help researchers handle non-numerical and unstructured data. The data was then coded and sorted according to emerging themes. Data from the different sources were triangulated. That is, to be included in the theory building process the comments had to have been collected with more than one research tool, and so a process of cross-checking was conducted to verify the comments. One of the main themes which emerged from the triangulation method was features which make an L2 lecture comprehensible for the students, and easier to deliver for the lecturers.

Features making an L2 lecture more comprehensible

The following sections highlight the main features students considered important when talking about how lecturers made the lecture material comprehensible to them. These features are summarised in Table 2, along with the number of students who made comments on these features. To be included as a feature more than half (nine) of the students made similar comments about the feature. The method of reporting on the data here is mostly descriptive, with representative comments from the students to illustrate the points made. Due to space limitations, only one or two quotations from the students are given for each feature. These features reported on can be categorized into language features and pedagogical features. All names are pseudonyms, and the code in brackets following the name, e.g., (FG), refers to the mode of data.

Language features	n
Simplification	17
Pronunciation	15
Specific content	10
Pedagogical features	
Use of examples	17
Lecture handout	17
Mapping of lecture with lecture handout	15
Staging of lecture	11
Preparing students in advance for lecture	9
Light atmosphere (humour)	9
Use of visuals	17
Attractive presentation	14
Body language	12

Table 2: Features which support lecture comprehension (n=17)

Language features

The features in this section relate only to those issues which had a clear focus on the use of English in lectures.

Simplification

The overriding, and widely shared concern of the students, was that lectures be given in simple English, all claiming that, for lectures to be comprehensible to them, the lecturers had to use uncomplicated language. This is not surprising considering that most of the students in this study had had difficulty passing their public school examinations, had not taken a great interest at school in learning English, and generally considered themselves weak in English. The students defined ‘simple English’ as sentences that were not overly long and vocabulary that was easy to comprehend. For instance, when talking about a lecturer who was not easy to follow, one student said:

David (FG): *He uses ... long words, long adjectives, long sentences so we get mixed up trying to listen to it.*

Students could readily identify a lecturer who had the ability to communicate the lecture material to them by using a simplified level of language. Many considered that it was not the medium of instruction, i.e., English, which was to blame for their lack of comprehension, but the subject matter itself. However, if lecturers managed to use simple English in their

presentations, then at least one barrier had been lifted and students could focus on the content of the lecture more easily.

Glen (FG): *He does not use too many difficult words and he always express in simple way.*

Ted (I): *I like when no difficult words used ... some lecturers use easy English for us so I can understand ...*

Pronunciation

A lecturer's accent was identified as a potential problem, and the students considered a local accent to be clearer and easier to follow. They preferred lectures to be delivered by local Hong Kong Chinese lecturers, and referred to these accents as 'clear' and 'standard'. This is not surprising since these were the accents the students were used to, with few of them having been taught in secondary school by anyone other than Hong Kong Chinese teachers. As a result, they had become accustomed to the prosodic features of the speech used by local teachers, and could follow such speech more easily.

Ernie (FG): *The lecturer's speed and pronunciation may be suitable for me, it's because which is very similar to the local English ...*

Specific content

The language used in different lectures had a major effect on the overall comprehension of students. Students preferred attending lectures in pure science over humanities-type subjects. They were more focused on science and engineering topics and had few difficulties with lectures in these disciplines, as the technical vocabulary was more familiar to the students and there was less narrative. However, when attending lectures which were more discursive by nature, their degree of comprehension declined.

David (I): *I think that I can understand about half of it, because it is due to he is talking about management and we can't understand what he really means. But in the other classes the lecturers are talking about the methods of calculations or working things out.*

Nevertheless, some students reported difficulties even in science lectures when long stretches of English were used to introduce new theoretical concepts.

Adam (J): *Can't follow it. It is so difficult. The lecturer use English to explain the theory I can't follow it.*

Pedagogical features

The aspects covered in this section relate to issues which were concerned with lecturers' teaching techniques.

Use of examples

One of the main ways in which students are helped to understand theory is by the use of examples. Examples in lectures were considered very important by the students, claiming that their comprehension of theory increased with the use of relevant examples. Therefore, if a lecturer presented a theory in relatively simple English, and followed this up with an example the students were able to understand, the lecture became easier to comprehend. All examples were considered important, but many of the examples these engineering students referred to in their conversations related to solving mathematical equations – the more examples of this nature the lecturer used, the easier the content of the lecture became. This may be due to the repetitive nature of the language the lecturer used.

Sammy (J): *This lecturer always uses some practical examples to develop our interest in this subject. I think it is very good approach.*

Eddie (FG): *... he gave us many examples so at last we understand ...*

The lecturers discussed their use of examples with the researcher, referring to them as 'working environment examples'. This is something which the students were aware of, and they commented on how these types of example made the lecture more interesting in a general way.

Lecture handouts

Lecture handouts were considered by the students to be overwhelmingly important. Lecturers who gave complete lecture handouts were considered 'good guys', and those who did not were blamed for many of the students' comprehension problems.

Jack (J): *I can follow easily because I have the notes, it is more easy to understand the topic.*

Stan (J): *He did not give me lecture handout this week so I cannot understand him speaking.*

The students were used to receiving annotated notes about the content of the lesson from their secondary school teachers, and came to rely on this form of support, especially those who considered their English to be weak.

Fredrick (LH): *... our teacher (in secondary school) know that our standard of English is low so he provides lots of worksheets for us.*

Even though the course documents for all the engineering courses state that one of the aims of the courses is to develop independent thinking, and some also state the intention to develop critical thinking in the students, many of the students considered detailed handouts a fundamental feature of a lecture. The students gave a variety of reasons for considering lecture handouts valuable: if they had handouts, they could focus on what was being said rather than try to make their own notes; the handouts often gave the lecture a clear focus; and handouts were considered essential for examination preparation. The issue of giving students detailed handouts of the lecture is complex, and sometimes difficult for lecturers to understand. In some cases, if students were able to focus more on the lecturers' comments because they did not have the 'burden' of making their own notes, then we may consider that they were developing independent and critical skills. However, if the reason for asking for detailed handouts was so that the student could 'switch off' from the lecture, then such an approach would reflect a less than independent or critical orientation.

Nicki (J): *During the lecture I don't need to make notes because the notes provided is enough and so I can more concentrate on the lecture.*

Jimmy (I): [Why are the lecture notes so important to you?] *It is because it allow us to follow the lecture in a more easy way.*

Glen (FG): [How important are the notes in your lecture?] *... very important. Some classmates said that if he haven't go to the lecture he can read through the notes and then go to the exam.*

Mapping of lecture through lecture handout

Closely related in importance to increasing the comprehension of lectures by students via handouts was the lecturer following his own handout in his lecture. If the lecturer had mapped out his lecture in his handout, and talked the students through it in stages, the ability of students to comprehend the lecture increased.

Angus (FG): *The lecturer has an OHP to show us the lecture. It is easy to follow him if we look at the transparency they are same as the lecture notes.*

Nicki (J): *English he spoke is very easy to understand. His speaking content is come from the lecture notes he provided. So I can follow his speaking.*

In addition to the support the students received from the lecture handouts, they also commented on other visual support helping them follow the lecture.

David (I): *The lecturers just speak English, but we can't understand them by just listening to them, unless we also watch the overhead projector.*

However, simply reading out his lecture handouts to the students was not considered an adequate lecturing strategy.

Johnson (FG): *Some lecturers only read the handout. The lecturer will give a handout and then in the lecture he only read the handout so cannot help us. The lecturer only read, read, read, read....so boring.*

It therefore appears that these students had difficulty in accepting any level of unstructured teaching in their lectures. That is, when the lecturer deviates from the expected format or subject of the lecture. This may not be surprising given their previous learning experiences as science students in Hong Kong, and their own understanding that they cannot follow complex language easily. When the lecture is clearly structured and mapped to a handout, listening comprehension seems to increase.

Staging of lecture

One of the ways in which lecturers could help students follow their lecture and their handouts was by dividing the lecture into identifiable parts, sections or stages, and then staging the lecture accordingly. In this way, the students knew which part of the lecture was being presented, e.g., theory v. examples, or main ideas v. asides, and which part of the lecture handout was being referred to. Such careful staging increased the students' ability to comprehend the lecture.

Eddie (I): *I can understand this lecture quite well since he taught us step by step from basic concept to principle. It was easy to learn.*

Preparing students in advance for lectures

When the students were given access to the lecture handouts prior to the lecture, they had an opportunity to read them, check any complex vocabulary, and look at any diagrams and calculations. Such preparation before the lecture led to the students having fewer problems during the lecture itself.

David (I): *Fortunately, I've read the notes before the lecture and so it is easy to follow him ...*

Light atmosphere (humour)

A lecturer's ability to handle the lecture with some humour and create a pleasant atmosphere in which to learn was also commented on by many of the students. When a lecturer was able to do this, the students were more receptive to the lecture, irrespective of the language used. They also maintained that it helped them focus on the talk and keep their concentration level high.

Jack (FG): *... he is very relaxed and creative in his teaching, he always makes jokes to us so we can learn under a relaxed condition. We feel much better.*

Gene: (I) [What does Dr X do that makes it easier for you to understand him?]
He will make some funny example for us and he will use some simple English to discuss the topics ... This is more interesting as we can get the ideas.

Use of visuals

Students claimed that when lecturers use technical support in their lectures, such as overhead projectors, visualisers, PowerPoint, or even just the white board, they are able to focus better on the talk. Some lecturers, of course, are more able to make use of such teaching aids either as a result of natural teaching abilities, or through practice. The effect on students' comprehension is often significant. If a student was having some difficulty with the language and/or the content, a visually supported presentation is one way of focusing his mind on the topic, helping him to keep track of the current stage of the lecture.

Terry (J): *He also uses some pictures to describe the topic. It helps attract the students ... I think that some students think this lecture so boring. Using different media solves this problem.*

Eddie (J): *The lecturer used the page projector to show our lecture notes on the screen which was a good idea as we can know which parts he was teaching.*

Attractive presentation

A variety of presentation techniques was also claimed to help the students maintain their concentration. When the lecturer deviates from a straight chalk-and-talk style of presentation, and attempts either more interaction or presents the lecture in a different way, the students' interest level is raised and students tend to focus more on the talk. Sometimes students may not feel at ease if the style of presentation is too 'threatening', for example, if the lecturer constantly challenges them to give answers. However, the students maintain that, if handled in the right way, they learn better if the lecturer does something different in his classes or even if he simply makes his presentation look interesting. Attractive presentations help students focus their attention of the lecture, and therefore potentially aid listening comprehension. There is a difference between the 'unstructured teaching' mentioned above and an alternative teaching style discussed here. With unstructured teaching students become confused because of an unexpected teaching style, while in alternative presentations the students understand the change in format.

Eddie (FG): *A funny picture or sometimes their own language makes us interested ...*

Stan (LH): [Do you find listening to a lecture easy?] *It depends on the lecturers' presentation skills. Some lecturers perform very well and I can listen what they speak very clear.*

Body language

When the lecturer moved around and made use of his body to emphasise points, students were better able to comprehend the lecture, or just to stay awake. On occasion, the actions of the lecturer served to illustrate points in his talk, for example, raising his arms to show increases in power, or using facial gestures to alert the students to something strange about an equation.

Adam (J): *When he is speaking he always have a lot of body language. This provides us more to concentrate in the lecture. When he explain something his body language helps us to understand, he waves his arms and moves around.*

Stan (FG): *Dr. P is always moving around, you have to watch him...he use the board a lot and goes from the board to the front, sometimes he walks near you when he is talking so you have to listen.*

A lecturer's body language is obviously something students observe, and many are more aware of a lecturer's body language than the lecturer himself. When asked about their lecturers' body language, many students could identify those lecturers who used body language in some way during the lectures. They also identified those lecturers who stayed behind the lectern, and did not use their body to convey any messages. These lectures were sometimes described as boring. Some lecturers undoubtedly have good habits, employing movements and gestures, of which they are only aware of if they are pointed out to them, but which, when used in the presentation of the lecture, can aid their students' comprehension.

Lecturer Strategies

In the focus group discussions with the engineering students in this study I investigated what teaching strategies these students appreciated their lecturers using. The rationale for this was that if students are able to identify what a 'good lecturer' did to help them comprehend, then these strategies could be advocated to other lecturers of L2 engineering students. The following paragraphs summarise the main comments the students made:

Use a variety of teaching styles in lecture

If the lecturer only has one teaching style, the students can lose interest and concentration easily. If, on the other hand, he varies his delivery techniques, their interest is heightened. This suggestion has implications for chunking lectures into manageable segments with the lecture changing the teaching techniques he uses – monologue, focussed questions, demonstration, board work, etc.

Demonstrate an interest in subject being taught

If a lecturer clearly demonstrated an interest in what he was teaching, perhaps through personal anecdotes of working experience, the students became more interested in the topic

themselves. As lecturers are often seen as information delivery sessions, students appreciated it when lecturers used examples from their own lives/working experience, as it 'lightened up' the atmosphere.

Give short lectures

Two-hour lectures, and especially those without any breaks, were too long for the students to maintain their concentration levels. The students in this study much preferred one-hour lectures.

Create a relaxed atmosphere

Humour and a friendly voice were often considered important in getting the students interested in the content of their lectures. Although lecturers cannot change their personalities, they should be aware that a few minutes of chat with the students at the beginning of a lecture might be all that is necessary to gain their interest in the rest of the lecture.

Test the content of lectures regularly

Perhaps because of their previous learning experiences of constantly being tested in secondary school, most students mentioned that they thought that their concentration and interest in their lectures was higher if they knew that they were going to be tested on particular content. Possibly the students would not like to be tested after each lecture, but their comments do help in considering alternative lecturing strategies in second language lectures.

Keep control of lecture

Students see the responsibility for policing the noise levels in the lectures as resting squarely with the lecturer. Lecturers who were 'tough' and asked students to be quiet if they started to chat to their neighbours, or created some other noises, were more popular than those who did not monitor or do anything about the noise levels in the lectures.

Discussion

In this study the students commented on a variety of issues which aided their listening

comprehension in L2 lectures. In general, these students were knowledgeable and sophisticated in their interpretation of what happened in their lectures given in a second language. They were able to describe their perceptions and concerns, and gave recommendations on how they thought the lecture event could be improved if their lecturers adopted specific lecturing strategies.

The descriptive analysis carried out as part of the ethnographic case study reported on in this paper is applicable to only the group under investigation, in this case, one group of Hong Kong Chinese, undergraduate engineering students, with low English proficiency skills, attending lectures given in English. However, the findings of this study may also be of use to other researchers or teachers in similar situations in helping them to interpret their own students' attitudes to listening to lectures in a second language.

As part of the ethnographic approach used in this study, the issues as outlined above, identified by the students as aiding their listening comprehension, were presented to the lecturers during follow-up interviews, and at a staff seminar in the Engineering Department for reflection and comment by the lecturers.

Some of the features identified by the engineering students were already known to the lecturers, e.g., attempting to keep their language comprehensible; the benefits of lecture handouts; and using visuals to exemplify concepts. However, the lecturers were only partially aware, or unaware, how important some of the other features identified by their students were in helping them follow the lectures, e.g., mapping of lectures to handout; and the fact that body language played a role in the students' comprehension. Therefore, one of the main benefits of conducting ethnographic investigations into academic listening is that it may inform the different stakeholders of behaviours they are not aware of.

As a result of the study reported on here, several of the engineering lecturers changed their lecturing behaviour. For instance, one lecturer stopped lecturing to large groups and divided his classes into smaller lecture groups. In this way he was able to monitor the students and give them more opportunities to ask him questions. A second lecturer opted to take all the tutorial groups of his lecture course, instead of asking research students to conduct them. He then used some of the findings of the study to talk with his students in their tutorial groups about their difficulties in following his lectures, from both a content and language perspective (see Miller, 2007 for a more detailed analysis of the lecturers' behaviour and how their students perceived this behaviour).

In addition to identifying features of the lecture and/or lecturers' behaviour which aided their listening comprehension, all the student participants commented that they wanted to continue to improve their English proficiency in order to understand more from their lectures. The students in this study had access to two types of English language support classes: EAP courses, which dealt with general academic language improvement; and ESP courses, which dealt with content specific English – the language of engineering. Overwhelmingly, the students commented on the usefulness of the ESP courses over those in EAP in respect to their language needs at university. Studies by Mparutsa, Love and Morrison (1991), Starfield (1994), and Huang (2006) also report that students are better motivated to study English when the courses and/or texts used are specific and subject-related. ESP courses better prepare students for the literacy demands made upon them in their disciplines, and students are highly aware of this. ESP courses therefore need to take account of the actual listening demands made upon learners in their content subjects, and find ways to prepare students for the different literacies used in lectures (see Dlaska (1999) for similar suggestions regarding British students attending lectures in German).

The results of this study concur with some of the earlier findings from studies into L2 students' listening to lectures (e.g., Flowerdew & Miller 1992; 1996b; Flowerdew, Miller, & Li, 2000). It may be somewhat gratifying to see that students are highly aware of what is happening in lectures from more than only a linguistic perspective, and that they do not 'blame' the lecturers use of complex language, or their own proficiency levels, for listening comprehension failure. With such an understanding, it may be easier for L2 students to control their anxiety levels and motivate themselves to comprehend their lectures from a wider, socially constructed perspective.

The lecturer strategies mentioned above may seem applicable in many lecturing contexts, yet, when considered in the context of second-language lecturing their significance is heightened. Lecturers in an L2 context need to make the different literacies used in their lectures as accessible as possible to their students so that their comprehension is as complete as it can be. Lecturers need to ask themselves some questions as they prepare to teach. For example, based on Lemke (2000):

- a) How many ways can I use to convey my message?
- b) How many literacies do the students need to be able to handle before they can make sense of my message?

- c) What level of language do students need to be able to comprehend?
- d) What culturally specific aspects of the lecture will be open or closed to the students?

One way in which lecturers can begin to answer these questions is by knowing something about the students' previous learning approaches and styles; the demands made on the students while they are in their first year at university; the type of language-support classes students take; and the type of background knowledge they have (or may not have). These factors may not always be known to lecturers, but, as we see in the results of this study, such factors are important in helping lecturers construct lectures which are accessible for their students who are studying in a second language.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the L2 engineering students in this study were highly aware of what aided their concentration and what helped them to comprehend their lectures more. Many of the features, as noted by the students, suggest strongly that comprehending lectures is not a passive listening activity. Students need to be engaged in the lecture and the lecturer needs to consider the lectures from both their language, and their pedagogical, aspects, and the strategies they employ. Simply presenting the information in what is considered a traditional lecturing manner does not satisfy these students, nor will it allow them access to the complex information presented in a second language. As a result of such ethnographic investigations, we may have a clearer idea of how to approach training/advising lecturers who teach in a second language.

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Diagnosing the Process, Text, and Intrusion Problems Responsible for L2 Listeners' Decoding Errors

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study which examined the nature of L2 listeners' decoding problems as they strived to comprehend authentic input. Rather than employing psycholinguistic laboratory methods to investigate decoding issues, this study utilized a procedure pertinent for teachers operating within a L2 classroom environment. Groups of Japanese, adult, EFL learners watched a sequence of audio-visual segments from each of two news videotexts, and wrote extended responses reflecting their comprehension of the segments' contents. Written responses indicative of decoding breakdowns were collated, and representative examples explored, explained, and discussed in terms of three potential problem sources identified in the literature: process, text, and intrusion problems. Based on this analysis, initial remedial action is recommended to address learners' issues with cliticisation and resyllabification, discriminating various vowels and consonants, and ill-conceived word choices. Useful teaching resources are suggested for alleviating such concerns.

Key words: L2 listening, spoken word recognition, Japanese EFL learners

Introduction

In recent years, a number of primary, and somewhat intersecting, research strands related to exploring listening comprehension¹ in the language classroom have become apparent. One strand, with a typically product-oriented focus, has tended to concentrate on identifying and quantifying the listening strategies learners deploy, as well as investigating the impact on learners' listening ability of instruction in the use of a pre-determined set of strategies to compensate for anticipated or actual breakdowns in comprehension (Field, 2008a). A second strand receiving increasing attention is concerned with examining the role of metacognitive instruction in promoting listening comprehension, and adopts a chiefly 'top-down', process-

based approach which aims to deepen learners' knowledge of themselves as listeners in a second language context and their understanding of the inherent challenges of L2 listening, as well as teaching them about ways to control their listening comprehension (Goh, 2008). A third research strand, for which there currently seems to be renewed interest, focuses on the process of L2 listening from a 'bottom-up' perspective, and explores the manner in which the perception of sounds and words contributes to the construction of meaning representations by listeners (Field, 2008b). The findings of several related studies (e.g., see Al-jasser, 2008; Field, 2008c) have provided insights into the perceptual processing difficulties listeners can experience. Accordingly, Field (2008a) advocates listening instruction involving small-scale remedial exercises aimed at introducing, creating awareness of, and providing listening practice for, features occurring in speech which have been identified as causing decoding problems. While this diagnostic approach seems valuable for informing understanding of decoding breakdowns and determining instructional interventions, the listening material used as the stimuli in such studies has typically been altered and/or is artificial in nature. The use of such material for research, or in guiding listening instruction, is clearly important. However, given the continuing interest in providing learners (at all levels) with opportunities to listen to authentic material (with its particular phonological and syntactic vagaries) in language classrooms, using such material as an alternative stimuli may, perhaps, provide for a more realistic account of learners' decoding difficulties, which may then be remedially addressed in the way suggested by Field. As such, this study aims to diagnose the nature of the problems learners experience as they strive to decode authentic listening material, specifically, news videotexts. Furthermore, a data collection and analysis approach which is more in tune with the type of problem detection that can occur within a classroom environment is adopted that can lead to corrective activities for the listeners concerned. That is, the noting of frequent decoding errors in the responses of listeners, considering potential causes based on the available literature, and determining remedial action.

Background

Field (2008a) states that listening comprehension consists of two overlapping operations – decoding and meaning building. Fundamentally, decoding encompasses the listener mapping the acoustic features of the incoming speech signal onto representations of target language

sounds, then into words and phrases in their vocabulary, prior to generating abstract concepts which carry the literal meaning of the input (Field, 2008a). To go beyond a literal interpretation, the listener engages in meaning building through exploiting their knowledge of the topic, culture, context and/or co-text, and determining the relevance and importance of the input to the given moment (Field, 2008a). While decoding and meaning building can both create particular problems for L2 listeners, the focus of this study is on those associated with the decoding of the incoming signal.

Word recognition is central to the decoding process, and Rost (2005) identifies various models accounting for the psycholinguistic competence involved in the rapid completion of this automatized process, e.g., the Cohort Model (Marslen-Wilson, 1987), the TRACE Model (McClelland & Elman, 1986). Rost (2005) broadly summarises the common aspects addressed by such models, that is:

“Words are:

- (1) Recognized through the interaction of perceived sound and knowledge of the likelihood of a word being uttered in a given context (Luce & Pisoni, 1998)
- (2) Recognized essentially in a sequential fashion, but not all words need to be recognized in sequence for speech processing to occur successfully. ...
- (3) Initially accessed by two main clues: the sounds that begin the word and lexical stress.
- (4) Recognized when the acoustic structure and other available cues eliminates all candidates but one – the most likely candidate.”
(p. 507)

Moreover, L2 models such as the Speech Learning Model (Flege, 1995), Perceptual Assimilation Model (Best, 1995) and the Feature-Geometry-based Model (Brown, 1998), though differing in notable ways, have in common the view that characteristics of the L1 are influential in L2 word recognition (Altenberg, 2005).

Word recognition encompasses two key, and interwoven, components, namely, lexical segmentation and word activation (Rost, 2005). Lexical segmentation relies on the ability to exploit lexical, syntactic and/or morphological knowledge (Altenberg, 2005), allophonic and prosodic cues, and knowledge of phonotactic conventions (e.g., illegal consonant clusters) (Al-jasser, 2008) to identify word boundaries in connected speech. It is among the most difficult procedures for L2 listeners to perform, particularly those at an intermediate-level

and below, as cues in connected speech can often be inconsistent and unreliable for marking word boundaries (Rost, 2005), and the range of conventions which the listener needs to know can be broad. Field (2003) also suggests a number of potential impediments to L2 listeners' lexical segmentation including the lack of pauses between words, and systematic variations to standard citation forms in connected speech such as reduction, assimilation, elision, resyllabification, and cliticisation (see Field, 2008a, p. 143-155 for details). Several recent studies (which used manipulated stimuli in a word-spotting task or syllable-gating procedure) have explored related aspects of EFL/ESL learners' lexical segmentation. These studies indicate that segmentation issues can arise because of learners' propensity towards using their long-established L1 phonotactic conventions as they listen to the L2, even when such conventions are unhelpful (Al-jasser, 2008; Weber & Cutler, 2006), and due to their reluctance to adjust word boundary decisions in spite of subsequent contradictory evidence, leading to the potential distortion of meaning representations (Field, 2008c).

The process of word activation encompasses the rapid, on-line activation and retrieval of lexis based on incoming perceptual evidence. A listener searches for a match between the prelexical representation of a lexical item detected in the spoken stimulus and a representation of that item among concurrently active and competing, multiple, potential candidates which exist as either abstract phonological representations or detailed acoustic traces in a complex network in their mental lexicon (Cooper, Cutler, & Wales, 2002; Pallier, Colomé, & Sebastián-Gallés, 2001). Initially, both the actual words spoken and other words plausible in the input are activated (Broersma & Cutler, 2008). This is best clarified using the example given by Broersma and Cutler:

“when a listener hears the phrase *what a strange act*, there is temporary but discernible activation not only of the words which were actually spoken, but also of other words supported by the input, both within the actual words (*stray, train, ray, range*, etc.) and across them (*is, jack, jacked*)” (2008, p. 24).

However, following lexical segmentation, the activation of competitors is strongly determined by (though not exclusively so) the initial portion of a word, i.e., word onset, with acoustic-phonetic information unfolding over time further guiding the activation process and constraining potential candidates (Jusczyk & Luce, 2002; Vitevitch, 2002). Once ambiguity is resolved and the best lexical match is found, information about the semantic and syntactic

characteristics of that lexical item is retrieved by the listener in a process termed lexical access (Field, 2008a). This matching process is also guided and constrained by other evidence such as that provided by the co-text and context, with the listener weighing up the various pieces of information against each other (Field, 2008a). An example of how the co-text may cause a listener to revise an initial match is given by Field (2008c):

“a listener who has decoded a piece of input as *the waiter cut it . . .* would have to suddenly backtrack and substitute *the way to cut it* if the sentence proved to end with the words . . . *is like this*. (p. 37)

In addition, word activation is influenced by four other primary factors: density (Jusczyk & Luce, 2002; Vitevich, 2002), frequency, currency of activation, and spreading activation (Field, 2008a):

- density – processing time and accuracy depends on the number of lexical competitors a word has, with the recognition of a target word that has many lexical competitors, or ‘neighbours’, requiring more processing time and being achieved with less accuracy than one in a sparse neighbourhood with few competitors.
- frequency – words whose usage in the target language is more frequent tend to be given greater weighting in listeners’ mental lexicons, and are activated with superior speed and accuracy. However, this depends on the density of the competitors, as there is greater competition in neighbourhoods made up of high frequency words than in neighbourhoods of lower frequency word, and this is detrimental to speed and accuracy (Jusczyk & Luce, 2002).
- current activation – traces of target words which have recently been activated in the mental lexicon help to reduce processing time when the listener hears them again.
- spreading activation – words are part of elaborate networks, and when a word is activated, a range of other strongly related words are also activated, e.g., the words ‘patient’ and ‘hospital’ are activated along with ‘doctor’. If the associated words then occur in the input, processing time may be faster.

A number of recent studies also provide insights into L2 word activation. The findings of these studies illustrate that suprasegmental cues such as word stress can help L2 listeners to selectively constrain the number of word candidates which are activated (Cooper, et al., 2002); L1 vocabulary is activated despite only the L2 being spoken and appropriate to the given situation (Weber & Cutler, 2004); L2 listeners who have activated a front running candidate are reticent to go through the competition process again despite conflicting evidence – the “perserveration effect” (Field, 2008c, p. 48); L2 listeners activate ‘phantom words’, i.e., words which do not exist in the input, and, compared to L1 listeners, more

potential word candidates are activated in L2 listening, and these words are activated longer (Broersma & Cutler, 2008).

Field (2008a) broadly categorizes the kind of problems of decoding outlined above according to two types, namely, process problems – those associated with listening skill deficiencies (e.g., the inability to swiftly locate word boundaries), and text problems – those associated with insufficient target language knowledge (e.g., of phonotactic conventions or vocabulary). Also, given the findings presented above, another category of decoding problems is intrusion problems – those related to the influence of the L1 (e.g., L1 phonotactic conventions and L1 word activation). As Field suggests, it is by no means easy to be sure in practical terms which type or types is responsible for decoding breakdowns, and they probably mutually interact to some degree in causing decoding difficulties. Nonetheless, they provide a useful framework for attempting to describe the potential causes of the range of problems L2 listeners can encounter as they decode the speech signal, which can, in turn, inform appropriate remedial action.

Thus, informed by the three broad categories of decoding problems – process problems, text problems, and intrusion problems, drawn from the literature on L2 word recognition, this study aims to investigate the decoding difficulties of a group of L2 listeners as they strive to comprehend authentic input. In contrast to previous studies in the field which employed stringently controlled psycholinguistic laboratory methods, the researcher adopted an approach more attuned to the procedure for, and practicalities of, exploring listeners' decoding issues in a L2 classroom environment. That is, analyzing learners' written responses reflecting their listening comprehension of authentic material, in this case news videotexts, which is presented in a manner representative of a classroom listening activity regularly exploited by the researcher, and collating common decoding errors to diagnose potential causes, in order to suggest, in broad terms, remedial action to help learners overcome deficiencies in their 'bottom-up' listening processes.

Research design

Aim

The aim of this study was to examine the nature of L2 listeners' decoding problems when they attempted to comprehend authentic news videotexts.

Participants

73 adult, Japanese males and females aged between 22 and 65 volunteered to take part in the study. All were attending advanced-level EFL courses at one of two English language schools in central Japan. According to in-house documentation, this advanced-level was approximately equivalent to IELTS 7.0 and above. A large number of participants were used in this study to build a record of decoding errors which were relatively common (in terms of the given listening material) and would prove insightful in guiding remedial action, and also inform a proactive response for other such learners.

News videotexts

At the research sites, supplementary listening material is largely drawn from authentic sources, and the BBC news is one such source utilized. As such, the BBC news videotexts used in this study reflect the kind of authentic material the learners are exposed to in their regular lessons, as well as being accessed by learners outside the classroom via the Internet or satellite broadcast channels. Furthermore, transactional authentic listening material was the focus of the study, as this mode of listening is predominant in the given EFL context, namely, Japan.

Two BBC news videotexts, each just under one and a half minutes long, with clearly defined segments, and of similar format with clear visual cuts between segments, were used. One news videotext, entitled ‘Armed robbery’, covered a large cash robbery from a security company, and the other, ‘Waste recycling’, was about recycling incentive schemes. Both of the news videotexts were edited into segments on a personal computer using conversion software, embedded in a PowerPoint file (Version 11), and burnt onto DVD. Segmentation was determined according to visual scene change and shift in audio content focus of the news videotext. The segmentation was done because the level of comprehension, and its subsequent recall, was not plausible should the news videotexts be played in full. One news videotext consisted of eight segments and the other nine segments. Segments typically contained two or three main or main and subordinate clauses, and were, on average, 9 seconds in length.

Data collection

The listening stage followed the researcher’s standard approach to using this type of material

in regular lessons with advanced-level learners. This experience had illustrated that two listenings to each segment was sufficient for learners to provide more than enough data for analysis in this study, despite the challenging nature of the input. It entailed the learners looking at the screen and listening as one of a series of segments of an authentic BBC news videotext was played. Each segment was shown twice. Learners could not write while the segment was played to ensure they had the chance to utilize information from the audio and visual channels to achieve comprehension, as in a 'real-life' context. Once a segment had finished playing the first time, learners made notes within a specified time. This delayed note taking ensured test takers were not distracted from listening, nor had their comprehension impaired by a concurrent response task. The segment was then shown again to allow for the effect of short-term memory decay on the information learners were able to recall. In terms of the analysis, it was also of interest to see whether decoding errors persisted across more than one listening (for less-advanced learners the number of listenings can, of course, be increased). Following this, learners used their notes to write extended responses reflecting their comprehension of the segment contents. The learners were told they were not required to recall the exact words in each segment, but should focus on recording their propositional understanding. Clearly, however, this would still require the recall of key phrases and vocabulary to construct written responses. These extended responses provided the raw data for the subsequent data analysis. As such, unlike other studies of L2 decoding, no attempt was made to manipulate the input and present participants with particular words, parts of words, or non-words containing the feature to be examined. Two native speakers completed the listening stage to ensure that across two listenings it was possible for a listener to comprehend each segment in full, which both native speakers were able to achieve.

Data analysis

Common decoding errors arising in the course of listening to the news videotexts were the focus of analysis, with the data revealing a range of information on the preferences learners' opted for from the input. This data analysis firstly involved identifying comprehension breakdowns (no response, partial response, or incorrect response potentially due to issues with either decoding or meaning building or both) for each of a total of 70 clauses in the news videotexts. Examining breakdowns at the level of the clause was chosen as listeners

construct meaning representations of utterances incrementally word-by-word and clause-by-clause (Field, 2004), so the clause provides a useful, initial, intermediate level of analysis. Any potential decoding errors in written responses, i.e., those errors indicative of process problems, text problems, or intrusion problems, were identified for each listener. As with Field (2008c), uncertainty regarding any data due to erratic spelling meant such data were excluded. Next, similar clausal errors were then grouped and tallied. These results are presented and discussed below.

Results

When examined at the clause level, eighty-one percent of written responses indicated some form of comprehension breakdown had occurred, reflecting the demanding nature of the listening material and task, even for advanced-level learners. These breakdowns were indicated by either (1) full omission of the clause, (2) only solitary lexical items or ‘chunks’ of lexis being included, or, (3) one or more content-related details were omitted or wrong, despite the meaning of the clausal proposition being essentially correct. For a written response to be accepted as reflecting full comprehension of the given clause, it could not contain any omissions or content-related errors, with errors in punctuation and grammatical and lexical form accepted when the meaning remained transparent and appropriate. Table 1 summarises the distribution of percentages for written responses.

Table 1 Learners’ written responses

<i>Written response</i>	<i>%</i>
(1) Full omission of clause	16
(2) Solitary lexical items or ‘chunks’ of lexis from clause	26
(3) Clausal proposition correct, but one or more content-related details omitted	39
Clausal proposition fully correct	19
Total	100

Among the written responses indicative of partial comprehension breakdown (i.e., written response types (2) or (3) in Table 1), examples considered to be strong candidates representative of decoding errors were identified, each reflecting potential process, text, or intrusion problems. Of course, learners would have experienced many more decoding issues, but only those reflected in their written responses can provide evidence of the kind of errors which occurred. This evidence is also likely to be representative of the decoding difficulties

other learners experienced, but whose written responses did not include any such indication. Examples of common errors are presented and discussed below.

Example 1

The clause “you’re letting the side down” was notably problematic for learners, with 40% not providing a response and 56% only writing a partially correct response. Among those learners who wrote partial responses, frequent decoding errors identified related to the last part of the clause, i.e., ‘the side down’ (N=39). Table 2 shows the breakdown of the decoding errors.

Table 2 Example 1 decoding errors

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... size down.	16
... sign down.	7
... decide down.	7
... sigh down.	5
... inside down.	2
... sight down.	2

These cases indicate that the given learners were able to determine the word boundary between ‘side’ and ‘down’. The majority of responses also indicated the learners were able to establish the onset syllable of ‘side’, but frequently perceived a different offset (see also Field, 2004). They had activated a range of potential word candidates with this correct onset, but had preferred one of them in favour of ‘side’. While this suggests a process problem, i.e., ‘side’ was known vocabulary but not recognized in connected speech, it may also have been a text problem. The idiom ‘let the side down’ is very low frequency (spoken frequency of 0.01 tokens per million (Davies, 2008-2009)), and it was highly unlikely the learners had encountered it before. Alternatively, learners were unaware of the potential for ‘side’ and ‘down’ to occur sequentially, which is an uncommon combination. Notably, the learners persisted with their incorrect choice without regard for semantic appropriacy.

The most preferred version of ‘side down’ was ‘size down’ (N=16). Apart from the possibility that process or text problems were responsible for this decoding error, it is also very possible that learners’ preference for ‘size down’ was due to an intrusion problem. That is, ‘size down’ is a loanword collocation which is used in Japanese to refer to a decrease in something (typically with respect to the downsizing of the workforce). It fitted the given

context of the news videotext topic, which was reducing rubbish through recycling.

Seven learners wrote ‘decide down’. This decoding error could have been due to an intrusion problem, with learners confusing the definite article /ðə/, containing the phoneme /ð/ which is not permitted in the L1, with the mora /de/ (a mora is a subsyllabic unit of phonology and the basic unit of rhythm in Japanese (Cutler, 1997)), as well as having trouble identifying the word boundary between ‘the’ and ‘side’, which represents a process problem. In either case, the learners had perceived the syllable associated with ‘the’ as affixed to ‘side’.

Example 2

The clause “there’s still some money in the van” received no response from 29% of learners, with 68% providing a response containing partial or incorrect content. The most noticeable decoding error was concerning the word ‘van’, with 34 learners producing an erroneous response in this regard, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Example 2 decoding errors

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... in the bank.	15
... in the bag.	8
... in the bar.	8
... in the back.	3

In contrast to the first example, the decoding errors seem strongly linked to an intrusion problem related to learners’ inability to distinguish between members of the minimal pair /b/ and /v/, and it seemed they had assimilated both sounds to Japanese /b/. This error with respect to the first syllable seems to have activated three potential candidates (at least), which were all semantically appropriate to the context (i.e., bank, bag, back). Japanese /b/ is the initial sound in the morae /ba/, /bi/, /bu/, /be/, and /bo/. The first of these, /ba/, appeared to influence 8 learners towards choosing “bar”, overriding both the /æ/ phoneme information in the first syllable and that “bar” was semantically inappropriate to the given context.

Example 3

A further example of note was with respect to the clause “A Securitas van is rammed by a tractor.” Only 7% of learners did not write a response, with 93% able to provide at least a

partial response. None of the learners, however, was able to comprehend this clause fully. Several lexical items seemed to be problematic for learners. Firstly, the name of a security company in one of the news videotexts, ‘Securitas’, was a source of confusion, with 21 learners providing an indication of the decoding problems encountered, as Table 4 shows.

Table 4 Example 3 decoding errors (1)

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... security task ...	13
... security asked ...	5
... security tax ...	3

It would seem that these decoding errors were associated to some extent with text problems. Learners failed to recognize the word ‘Securitas’, perhaps not unsurprisingly, as proper nouns such as names of people, organizations, or places, are typically low frequency items and unfamiliar to learners who may have had limited experience of the target culture. In terms of process problems, the known word ‘security’ was preferred in responses, as it was a strong candidate for activation given its first three syllables were identical to ‘Securitas’. Having preferred ‘security’ as a lexical match, most learners dealt with the final syllable /tæs/ by ‘imagining’ a word boundary had existed, and they had perceived and activated other lexical items corresponding to this erroneous onset. In particular, ‘task’ was favoured by most of the given learners, despite a vowel discrepancy (/a:/ instead of /æ/). Though slightly odd, the phrase ‘security task’ fitted the context. That is, “A security task van...” had a measure of appropriacy, and the learners had considered it a plausible option. Again, some learners persisted with an erroneous lexical choice, and disregarded whether or not ‘tax’ or ‘asked’ were semantically appropriate.

The word ‘rammed’ in this clause was also problematic, with learners generating a variety of responses (N=31), presented in Table 5, reflecting their miscomprehension.

Table 5 Example 3 decoding errors (2)

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... banned by a tractor.	6
... learned by a tractor.	6
... burned by a tractor.	4
... rounded by a tractor.	4

... round by a tractor.	4
... around is a tractor.	2
... surrounded by a tractor.	1
... bound by a tractor.	1
... run by a tractor.	1
... alarmed by tractor.	1
... lured by a tractor.	1

As shown in Table 5, a range of other words were activated by learners and given preference over ‘rammed’. The usage frequency of the word ‘rammed’ is low (0.88 tokens per million (Davies, 2008-2009)), and was a potential reason for few learners decoding it accurately. This suggests learners may have experienced a text problem, though it is possible it was a process problem in that some knew the word but could not recognize it in connected speech (Field, 2008c). In addition, process problems could have been responsible for decoding breakdowns. 12 of the learners mistakenly perceived the phoneme /au/ instead of /æ/, and activated and selected a number of different candidates containing this sound. A possible reason for the choice of ‘banned’ by 6 learners was interference from the first syllable of ‘van’, which had occurred in close proximity. This syllable may have been perceived as /bæ/, a likely intrusion problem (preferring /b/ instead of /v/), and this word had overridden subsequent input which proved problematic or had been missed, i.e., ‘rammed’. Another intrusion problem was related to the minimal pair /r/ and /l/, with 7 learners choosing words beginning with the latter consonant, the majority opting for ‘learned’, which also contained a vowel mismatch. Notably, none of the words preferred to ‘rammed’ were semantically appropriate. Learners had persisted with their choices, even though they had comprehended the prepositional phrase, ‘by a tractor’. This phrase should have been informative regarding the appropriacy or otherwise of their word choice.

Example 4

Learners found the clause “as a carrot to promote recycling” difficult to comprehend, with 21% of learners being unable to respond at all, and the remaining 79% only recording partial responses. A fairly regular decoding error identified for this clause was with respect to the miscomprehension of ‘carrot to’ (N=20). Table 6 presents related errors.

Table 6 Example 4 decoding errors

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... character	9

... character promote recycling.	6
... character reduce ...	3
... characters of recycling.	1
... a character who...	1

As learners were advanced-level, it is safe to assume that that ‘carrot’ was part of their existing vocabulary store and a strong candidate for activation. Nevertheless, several aspects potentially militated against its recognition. One was that learners did not feel confident that ‘carrot’ was appropriate in the given context, nor were unaware that ‘carrot’ may also refer to a kind of incentive, a text problem. Either of these conditions could have overruled it as a choice. A process problem was that, rather than a word boundary being identified between ‘carrot’ and ‘to’, the weak form of the word ‘to’, i.e., /tə/, was perceived as affixed to ‘carrot’. Learners appeared to have perceived /kærrətə/, which is a close approximation to the sound sequence for ‘character’. Notably, for 9 of the learners who had made a best match with ‘character’, they had been unable to process the remainder of the clause, i.e., ‘to promote recycling’, suggesting the misperception had created confusion and inhibited their listening and meaning-making.

Example 5

One final example which created problems was the clause “11% of household waste was recycled”. 74% of learners showed at least partial understanding, with 26% producing fully correct responses. A relatively common decoding error among responses was regarding the word ‘household’, with 20 learners writing an erroneous response, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Example 5 decoding errors

<i>Decoding error</i>	<i>N</i>
... high solid waste ...	7
... high sold waste ...	7
... high source waste ...	4
... house old rubbish ...	2

The decoding errors presented highlight learners had ‘imagined’ a word boundary between the first and second syllable of ‘household’. This may have occurred because the usage of ‘household’ is not frequent (it has a spoken word frequency of 14.54 per million (Davies, 2008-2009)), and may not have been part of the learners’ mental lexicons, suggesting a text problem. The separation of ‘household’ into two words may also have been associated with a process problem due to resyllabification, i.e., where English speakers redistribute the final

consonant from the previous syllable (or word) to the start of the following word (Field, 2008a). Learners had attached the final /s/ of 'house' to a perceived second word approximated to 'hold'. While the second vowel sound in 'hold' was mostly perceived correctly, this did not always result in their making a correct match or considering the semantic appropriacy of their choice. Additionally, the majority of learners misheard the first vowel sound, perceiving the vowel /ai/ and selecting 'high' instead of the /au/ vowel in 'house'. This also might have influenced word boundary decisions. Again, 'high' was a semantically inappropriate choice.

Discussion

This study explored Japanese EFL learners' decoding errors due to the process, text, and intrusion problems they encountered when listening to authentic segments of news videotexts. As the representative examples presented show, a variety of decoding issues were evident, and for each example there was a range of responses reflecting similarities and differences in decoding breakdowns for the given learners. However, the analysis for the selected examples highlights, as mentioned above, that it is not always a straightforward process to pinpoint whether the decoding issue at hand clearly relates to a process, text, or intrusion problem. Realistically, the examples above indicate that decoding errors are likely to result due to some combination of problem types, with possibly one type of problem being more prominent as the cause of a particular decoding error. Furthermore, although within each example there were decoding errors common across listeners and assertions regarding the associated type of problem responsible were subsequently made, each individual listener obviously processes the incoming speech stream in an idiosyncratic manner. As such, decisions regarding the most likely problem listeners experienced for a common decoding error should be viewed as informed generalizations. Nonetheless, such generalizations are still useful for guiding decisions with respect to appropriate remedial action.

The examples presented highlight a number of aspects regarding the types of decoding problems learners experienced as they attempted to comprehend the segments of news videotext:

Process problems

The examples show that learners experienced a number of issues due to listening skill shortcomings. With respect to achieving lexical segmentation by establishing word boundaries, the presence of an unstressed word of one syllable before or after a known (but not necessarily recognized) word caused the activation of words which were formed from across words in the input, as Broersma & Cutler (2008) suggest. For example, ‘the side’ as ‘decide’ and ‘carrot to’ as ‘character’. These two examples show that learners can mishear some feature of the incoming words in connected speech, and this distortion leads to the activation of approximate known words which only contain partial elements of the actual words in the input. It appears lexical stress (on /said/ and /kæ/ in the two examples) was important in activating potential candidates, from which a best match was made. This selection process appeared heavily influenced by the effects of cliticisation, i.e., the tendency of the speaker to group syllables together into strong-weak (SW) or, less commonly, strong-weak-weak (SWW) patterns (Field, 2008a). As a result, word boundaries can become blurred, and some learners in this study lacked the ability to decipher genuine word boundaries. Another word boundary issue arising was that syllables that were carrying secondary stress in a word were incorrectly processed as separate words, i.e., learners inserted an imaginary word boundary prior to the syllable with this characteristic. For instance, the final syllables in ‘Securitas’ and ‘household’ were perceived and activated as another monosyllabic word separate from the actual word, which is indicative of an incorrect word boundary decision. For ‘household’, this decision-making seemed to be influenced by the effects of resyllabification. Learners’ decoding errors also indicated that some had problems with perceiving the vowel sound in word initial syllables, e.g., /hai/ (for ‘high’) instead of /hau/ (for ‘household’), /rau/ (for ‘round’) instead of /ræ/ (for ‘rammed’). Given that word onsets are notably salient cues for activating word candidates (Jusczyk & Luce, 2002; Vitevitch, 2002), this processing deficiency could have been a strong reason for mismatches and the appearance of ‘phantom words’ in learners’ written responses. Both words also carry primary stress on the first syllable, with such monosyllabic words or words stressed on the first syllable making up 85.6% of content words in English (Cutler & Carter, 1987). Therefore, a stressed first syllable is an important and reliable feature in guiding word activation in the mental lexicon, and a wrongly perceived vowel in this position clearly had negative consequences for learners’ decoding accuracy.

Text problems

Several examples illustrate decoding errors arising possibly due to deficient vocabulary knowledge. In particular, idiomatic language, proper nouns, and low frequency words were problematic. What the examples reveal is that a known word was matched instead of the actual word in the speech stream, with most, if not all, of the choices learners adhered to being semantically inappropriate. Field (2004) also found this propensity among learners to match, sometimes very approximately, a problem word with a known one, and suggested that such decoding errors occur due to a known (and more frequent) word possibly distorting ‘bottom-up’ perceptual evidence and overriding ‘top-down’ contextual (and co-textual) information, as well as because such counter-indications were potentially being ignored (e.g., the co-text ‘by a tractor’ in Example 3) or not attended to (e.g., visual information). Additionally, the partial responses given for some clauses in this study indicate that co-textual information was not always decoded and available to inform decision-making regarding word appropriacy, and therefore it may be that a known word could not be rejected in such cases, regardless of it being inappropriate. Furthermore, it is evident that learners in the given examples had adhered to an incorrect match across the two opportunities to listen. While this may be due to an inability to decode the correct word across the two listenings, Field (2008c) offers an alternative interpretation in terms of the “perseveration effect” (p. 48). That is, once a candidate had been chosen as a good match in the first listening, learners were reluctant to engage in the competition process once more, in spite of encountering evidence in the second listening contradicting their initial match. This may be due to learners not having enough attentional capacity to reconsider competitors (Field, 2008c).

Intrusion problems

Among the examples, it was apparent that the learners’ L1 influenced the decoding process. Firstly, some learners encountered minimal pair interference in terms of being unable to discriminate between /b/ and /v/, preferring to assimilate both sounds to Japanese /b/. This difficulty is not uncommon for Japanese learners of English, though it becomes less evident with more experience of the L2 (Brown, 2000). Nonetheless, it seemed to be relatively persistent for the given advanced-level learners in this study. In addition, a well-documented

issue for Japanese learners of English regarding difficulty with discriminating between /l/ and /r/ was manifest for some learners in this study, as their L1 contains neither consonant but the Japanese liquid phoneme /r/. This phoneme is ‘in-between’ the two English consonants and does not map well onto either (Guion, Flege, Akahane-Yamada, & Pruitt, 2000), though it is more similar to /l/ (Aoyama et al., 2004). Related studies have found an English /l/ is more often heard as Japanese /r/ (e.g., Riney, Takada, & Ota, 2000). However, several learners in this study substituted English /l/ for English /r/, perhaps mistakenly perceiving a phoneme closer to Japanese /r/ in connected speech and approximating it with English /l/. The related decoding errors illustrated that learners adhere to the L1 phoneme choice despite conflicting contextual/co-textual evidence, perhaps because uncertainty may have caused learners to trust their more reliable L1 phonemes rather than other information. Furthermore, one example showed that learners matched a Japanese-English phrase ‘size down’ to ‘side down’ which was part of a clause in the input. This suggests that these learners had not only activated L2 word candidates, but had also activated loanwords in their mental lexicons. Loanword collocations such as ‘size down’ are common in Japanese (as is the use of the affix ‘down’ (Honna, 1995)), and typically include two loanwords which both correspond to high frequency English words (Daulton, 1999). Hence, they are likely to carry weight as candidates for activation when they approximate to actual words spoken.

Pedagogical aspects

This study purposefully used a method which is more suited to the practicalities of L2 classroom contexts than most previous decoding studies which employed psycholinguistic laboratory methods. That is, classes of learners were presented with a sequence of segments from an authentic news videotext. This mode of presentation made the use of this material more structured and manageable for the listening task and eliciting written extended responses, as well as encouraging a primary focus on propositional understanding rather than directing learners towards complete word-for-word recall. The use of a series of segments longer than a sentence also enabled the learners to utilize contextual and co-textual information, more closely reflecting real-life listening, and enabled the researcher to see if such information was overridden by ‘bottom-up’ concerns. Any decoding errors which arose in written extended responses were analyzed in terms of process, text, and intrusion problems. However, the trade-off for implementing this less-controlled type of approach is

that there is the likelihood of some learners only providing partial responses, or not being able to write a response at all (see also, however, a more controlled study by Field (2004) in which this occurs). Omitted information still provides insights into parts of the incoming speech stream which were problematic for learners, and can form part of the input for remedial activities. Alternatively, they can be reduced by increasing the number of times the material is presented to fit the level of learners, though one has to be cautious about repetitive listenings and a dictation mentality, as this may promote the view among learners that successful listening in the L2 entails word-for-word recall. Initially, learners should be informed that their comprehension focus should be on propositional understanding of the input, as in this study. The remedial stage can then involve more repetition of problematic parts of the input, either complete sentences, clauses, or phrases, but it should be made explicitly clear to learners that associated activities are part of a post-listening ‘learning to listen’ remedial stage. Moreover, like in this study, as this approach is used with more and more classes of learners (in this case advanced-level Japanese EFL learners), the teacher can build up a picture of recurrent decoding errors over time for the given listening material, enabling selective attention to decoding problems which are common to a listening text and across listening texts for these learners. Essentially, it is a form of needs analysis. This can also be extended to the longitudinal profiling of individual learners within a class to inform focused self-study at home or in self-access centres.

To identify the problem sources for their learners’ decoding errors, teachers need to recognize the possible types of problems which impinge on learners’ decoding processes, as well as be well-informed regarding the literature related to those problems. However, this study has shown that it can be troublesome to determine the precise type of problem leading to decoding breakdowns. Thus, it is important for teachers to consider and address more than one potential problem source for some decoding errors. The diagnosis of problems in this study, based on the five examples, suggests that learners initially could be assisted with:

- awareness of cliticisation and resyllabification
- discrimination of consonants - /v/ and /b/, /l/ and /r/
- discrimination of vowel sounds - /ai/, /au/, and /æ/
- confirming/revising word choices using other evidence.

There is a wide array of remedial activities in readily available published materials to facilitate assistance (which are thus not in need of detailed consideration here), and such

activities can and should be adapted and used in an informed manner with respect to helping a particular group of learners to minimize decoding errors associated with the process, text, and intrusion problems they are found to encounter with elements of the given listening text. Field (2008a) provides abundant information on a range of example activities which can be modified and exploited to aid learners encountering the issues outlined above. Material for a number of course book series also offers related ideas which can be adapted, e.g., the Listening Clinic sections in *Top-up Listening 3* (Cooney, Cleary, & Holden, 2003), and *New Headway Pronunciation Upper Intermediate Student's Practice Book* (Bowler & Cunningham, 2005). Pedagogy-related journal articles are also a potential source for activities (see Cross, 2002; Field, 2003). Other valuable material the researcher has adapted activities from and then used in both a proactive and remedial way in listening lessons includes *Ship or sheep? An intermediate pronunciation course* (Baker, 2006), and *Streaming speech: Listening and pronunciation for advanced learners of English* (Cauldwell, 2003). It is important to note that the listening material used with such activities should preferably be excerpts drawn from the original listening material for it helps learners to contextualize where and how they went wrong. In addition, the fact that they are working on identified decoding problems within the given text, rather than random samples, is more motivating and can promote greater concern for dealing with decoding problems.

Conclusion

This study investigated the possible process, text, and intrusion problems that can lead to decoding errors for L2 listeners. Unlike most other studies, authentic listening material was utilized along with a diagnostic approach suited to a L2 classroom situation. Examples of decoding errors were examined to illustrate the types of associated problems potentially responsible for given errors, with the analysis revealing findings consistent with a range of previous related studies into L2 listeners' decoding processes. For L2 teachers who have a sound grasp of their learners' process, text, and intrusion problems, this study shows such knowledge can help to inform the content of listening lessons to address those particular decoding problems evident, which may minimize their impact and promote enhanced listening comprehension.

Notes

¹ Listening comprehension is defined as “an active process in which listeners select and interpret information which comes from auditory and *visual* [my emphasis] clues” (Rubin 1995, p. 7).

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Listening Strategy Instruction: Exploring Taiwanese College Students' Strategy Development

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Abstract

This study reports on the implementation of strategy instruction (SI) in the regular EFL listening curriculum in the context of a Taiwanese technological college. Rather than examining a cause-effect relationship, this study focused in particular on exploring learners' listening strategy development over the course of SI. The participants were 31 non-English major students of different listening proficiency enrolled in an EFL listening course for fourteen weeks. The SI consisted of in-class strategy awareness-raising, demonstration, practicing and discussion of students' strategy use, as well as out-of-class students' self-reflection on their own listening processes. Reflective journals were employed to provide quantitative and qualitative insights into how students develop their strategy use over time, and how they adapted themselves to learn in more self-directed ways. Results showed that students reported greater awareness and control of their listening strategies. This study demonstrates that SI can be integrated in the EFL listening classroom, and can lead to positive effects for learners' understanding and use of listening strategies. The paper concludes with discussions of, and implication for, implementing SI in regular EFL listening curriculum within the constraints imposed by the given context.

Key words: listening comprehension, strategy instruction, Taiwanese college students

Introduction

In the globalized information age in which we live, technological advances have made global communication easily accessible. In order to be part of this global community, English listening comprehension has taken on increased importance for ESL/EFL learners, since failing to comprehend spoken English may cause non-understanding or misunderstanding which in turn leads to a breakdown in communication. In addition, as L2/FL listening is the most fundamental macroskill (Richards, 2005; Rost, 2002), it is imperative to put more time and effort into addressing this skill.

In the case of English language learning at the college level in Taiwan, students are required to enroll an EFL course for 2 to 3 hours a week. However, with class time constraints, it is difficult for a teacher to cover all the necessary language skills, and, in such circumstances, listening is the skill that is usually neglected. Even when listening is the focus of the class, the pressure to prepare students for general English proficiency tests means that listening is mostly ‘tested’ and not ‘taught’, i.e., there seems to be a negative washback effect (Bachman, 1990), and teachers often overlook the process of helping students learn to listen (Mendelsohn, 1994; Sheerin, 1987; Vandergrift, 2004). Moreover, students passively rely on teachers’ instruction, and seldom realize that they themselves must be active in their listening and learning to listen (Goh & Taib, 2006; Vandergrift, 2003). As a result, although students may try to immerse themselves in spoken English by listening to easily accessible English language broadcasts, movies, CDs and interactive software outside the classroom, they often fail to comprehend spoken texts even after repeated attempts to listen. At this point, it is not unusual for them to stop and give up on their listening tasks, often when they encounter unfamiliar words, claiming that they have understood nothing (Goh, 2000). One way to seek to remedy these problems is to shift the attention from test-oriented teaching toward more student-oriented instruction, in which the key focus is on helping students to develop their listening strategies and learn how to actively listen, and this paper reports on a program of listening strategy instruction with this objective in mind.

Background

Listening processes

Listening comprehension involves the continuing construction of an interpretation of the spoken input, and the ability to adjust the interpretation in response to new information is especially crucial in the L2 listening (Buck, 2001). First language listeners may process the listening input automatically without much conscious attention to word-by-word input; in contrast, most L2 listeners need to consciously decode the details, and construct the meaning of, the listening input. Comprehension breaks down primarily due to listeners’ limited working memory and linguistic knowledge (Vandergrift, 2004). There are two dimensions often cited in relation to listening comprehension processes – ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’. Anderson and Lynch (1988) describe bottom-up processing as “listener as tape-recorder”

(p.9) that involves decoding or text-based processes, while top-down processing relates to the “listener as active model builder” (p.11) and involves knowledge-based processes (e.g., using topic knowledge). Whether there is a greater preference for bottom-up or top-down processing among listeners of different proficiency levels has attracted contradictory views in various pieces of research (Field, 2004; O’Malley, Chamot, & Kupper 1989; Osada, 2001; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Vogely, 1995). It is suggested that successful listening comprehension relies on the integration of, and the balance between, both bottom-up and top-down facets (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Vandergrift, 2004), while the nature of that balance may vary depending on a number of different factors, e.g., the text, task, speaker, listener and input processing factors (Rubin, 1994).

As listening comprehension is a complex, online process which involves the interaction of various bottom-up and top-down factors, many learners find it difficult to comprehend the input. A number of studies have clarified L2 listening problems encountered by listeners (Flowerdew & Miller, 1996; Goh, 2000; Graham, 2006; Hasan, 2000). Although there have been a wide range of listening problems identified among these studies, the most commonly identified problems were fast speech rate and unfamiliar words. In addition, there seems to be a tendency for most learners to falsely assume or blame their listening problems on external factors related to the text or task, rather than internal factors such as their anxiety, background knowledge, language proficiency or their approach to listening. Even though there were some reported problems related to listener or input processing factors, they were mostly confined to the lower level processing problems such as in identifying words they know, in chunking streams of speech, and in concentration. This implies that most learners have limited knowledge of their ways of dealing with comprehending the input, and little awareness of the actual problems occurring during their online processing. These listening problems have long been ignored and remained unresolved in the conventional teaching of listening in Taiwanese EFL classrooms, which often involves practicing listening test questions followed by explaining meaning. One of the most important ways which may help learners overcome their listening problems and facilitate successful listening is to guide them in employing the right tools – to use listening strategies effectively to compensate for breakdowns.

Listening strategies

Chamot (1995) describes language learner strategies (LLS) as “the steps, plans, insights, and reflections that learners employ to learn more effectively” (p.1). In addition, Cohen (1998) defines LLS as “the steps or actions consciously selected by learners either for the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both” (p. 8). Hence, effective employment of LLS not only helps learners in improving their language use, but also empowers them in activating their learning processes.

LLS have been explored in language learning in general and language skills in particular, including listening. For instance, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) have provided lists of LLS used in listening comprehension. In addition, drawing on O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) classification of metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies, Vandergrift (1997) has presented a detailed chart of listening strategies with their definitions and examples, and Goh (2002) has analyzed several subcategories under these three major categories. Moreover, a wide set of studies have been done on investigating learners’ listening strategies (Bacon, 1992; Goh, 1998, 2002; Graham, 2003; O’Malley, et al., 1989; Rost & Ross, 1991; Taylor, 2005; Vandergrift, 1997, 2003; Vogely, 1995). These studies, while having been conducted in different contexts and having taken different perspectives, provide a general picture of listening strategies used by L2 learners, and highlight differences in the strategy use between more- and less-proficient listeners. In general, the findings of these studies suggest that applying a variety of strategies, self-monitoring, selective attention, elaboration, inferencing and focusing on the main idea were more highly associated with more-proficient listeners, while using limited strategies, using translation strategies, and focusing on the text and unknown words were linked more to less-proficient listeners. However, one question raised by these descriptive studies is how to bridge the gap between successful and unsuccessful listeners through listening strategy instruction.

Although the effectiveness of listening strategy instruction on improving learners’ listening proficiency has been illustrated to varying degrees across a range of settings (e.g., Carrier, 2003; Cross, 2009; Harris, 2007; McGruddy, 1995; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Ozeki, 2000; Thompson & Rubin, 1996), most of these studies have been based on quantitative pre- and post-test designs that examined the outcome of strategy instruction. More recent research has argued that it is not the quantity of strategy use, but the quality of

strategy use, that is also crucial to promoting L2 performance (Goh, 2002; Graham, 2003; Oxford, 2001; Vann & Abraham, 1990). Therefore, guiding learners to reflect on how they listen and effectively orchestrate clusters of strategies, that is, to raise the strategic aspect of learners' metacognition (i.e., awareness and control), may be a key factor in strategy instruction (Chamot, 2005; Goh, 2008; Vandergrift, 2003, 2007).

Metacognition

Metacognition involves “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes ... [and] active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes” (Flavell, 1976, p.232). Metacognition has been broadly defined as awareness and control of one’s cognition which consists of two distinct components, knowledge and regulation (Flavell, 1976; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Wenden, 1998). According to Flavell (1979), metacognitive knowledge can be further divided into knowledge of person, task and strategy that influence a person’s performance, while regulation refers to conscious monitoring that involves control of both cognitive and affective processes. Developing metacognition, on the one hand, guides learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process and to select appropriate strategies for different task demands; on the other hand, it also enhances the development of cognitive skills (Anderson, 2002). Hence, metacognition has been regarded as the self-direction required in L2 performance and learning, which is crucial in helping passive recipients of instruction to develop into active participants in their own learning (Wenden, 1998). Furthermore, enhancing metacognition is also important for EFL learners in an input-poor environment, because it encourages learners to be actively involved and can motivate them to find opportunities for self-directed learning outside the classroom (Huang, 2005).

Strategy instruction models

A number of systematic models of strategy instruction (SI) have been suggested (e.g., Chamot & O’Malley, 1994; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). These models share some similar steps to some extent. These general steps are raising strategic awareness, modeling, practicing, and evaluating strategy use. In general, these models emphasize the importance of explicit strategy training, the development of metacognition, modeling and presenting

new strategies, practice by learners, self-reflection and expansion of effective strategy use, as well as the gradual shift from teachers' support to learners' self-directed learning in selecting and applying appropriate strategies.

Particularly for listening SI, Mendelsohn (1994) has proposed a strategy-based approach which provides structured rationales, procedures, and implementations for strategy instruction in L2 listening. Similarly, Chamot (1995) has suggested procedures for integrated listening SI such as identifying students' listening strategies and enhancing their metacognition, modeling the selected strategies through thinking aloud, discussing what strategies are used before, while and after listening, and encouraging students to plan, practice and reflect on their strategies. In doing so, learners might be able to facilitate strategy transfer to new listening tasks and achieve more successful listening.

The ultimate goal of SI is to promote learner autonomy (Cohen, 1998), and these models have provided useful guides and procedures for teachers to assist their students to achieve this goal even when they leave the language classroom. It is crucial for listening teachers to take these models into account and adjust these phases according to the learning tasks and students' needs. Over the past decade, much of the listening SI research has been conducted and proved to be effective in a Western context where learner autonomy and self-regulated learning are valued and emphasized. However, questions arise whether the same listening SI would result in an improvement of performance and active learning about L2 listening, where most students have been influenced by the strong washback effects of testing (Bachman, 1990) that are predominant in the context of EFL listening pedagogy in Taiwan. Thus, the need to conduct listening SI in such a context is evident.

Research design

This classroom-based study focused on raising students' awareness of their strategy use and to guide them to employ effective strategies for listening tasks, and in turn, to empower them to take charge of their own learning about L2 listening when they leave the EFL classroom. Furthermore, rather than examining the end-product of listening SI, this study focused in particular on exploring learners' listening strategy development during the course of SI. More specifically, the research question guiding this investigation was:

- How do EFL learners adjust their initial listening strategy use over time during the course of listening SI?

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 31 EFL college students enrolled in a course – English Listening Practice – in a technological college in Taiwan. They had learned English as a subject in school settings for at least six years, and their English proficiency ranges from high-beginning to low-intermediate level. They had neither studied abroad before, nor currently attended additional English classes outside of the classroom. The class met for two hours every week for fourteen weeks, and the listening materials in this course included the textbook *Impact Listening 2* (Robbins & MacNeill, 2007), some supplementary authentic audio and video clips (around 140 words/minute, with a range 1-3 minutes) and listening comprehension test practice. The SI was integrated as an extension of the listening curriculum which was similar to the one used in the previous semester, but which focused participants on learning to listen. Prior to the SI, participants took the intermediate level of General English Proficiency Test, which is designed to assess EFL proficiency of high school graduates or equivalents. The listening comprehension section considers scores above 80 out of the total 120 points to be a pass. According to the scores, those whose scores over 80 were ranked as high proficiency (HP) listeners (N=9), those ranged at 60-79 were ranked as middle proficiency (MP) (N=13), and those below 59 were ranked as low proficiency (LP) (N=9).

Procedure

In every SI session, the instructor modeled listening strategies which had been shown from the research reviewed in the literature section to be potentially effective and appropriate for the unidirectional listening tasks. Metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective listening strategies were taught in the SI sessions. Metacognitive strategies, which involve planning, monitoring and evaluating the listening process, have a central role in learning and can be applied to every learning task, and the training of these strategies was emphasized in each session. That is, students were familiarized with the procedures of pre-listening planning, while-listening monitoring, directed attention and selective attention as well as post-listening evaluation as strategies to deal with a listening task. Cognitive strategies are directly involved in the learning task, and adapted to different task demands. Since this study focused mainly on the strategies for unidirectional listening tasks, the cognitive strategies

modeled in each session were those appropriate to that purpose. The cognitive strategies modeled included listening for gist, listening for details, inferencing, prediction, elaboration, visualization, summarization and note-taking. In addition, students were reminded to use social/affective strategies such as cooperation and confidence-building during the SI sessions. Furthermore, in order to facilitate students' strategy utilizations in a more systematic way, the general Performance Checklist for Listening Strategies (see Appendix A), which was adapted from Vandergrift (1999) and Harris (2007), was distributed to students once they had accomplished their listening tasks in class. The strategy training procedures followed the general steps which have been suggested from several SI models (e.g., Chamot 1995; Chamot & O'Malley 1994; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins 1999, Grenfell & Harris 1999; Mendelsohn 1994; O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford, 1990). These training phases are summarized as follows:

- Strategic-awareness raising phase: the teacher raised students' strategic awareness by modeling and employing think-aloud procedures.
- Demonstration phase: the teacher modeled the strategies appropriate for the task demands in this session.
- Practice phase: students practiced the focused strategies with similar tasks, and discussed their strategy use, the problems they encountered and possible solutions.
- Evaluation phase: students then self-evaluated the effectiveness of the focused strategies.

In addition to the above in-class SI, this study added another phase of outside-class self-directed practice. Participants were encouraged to self-observe and self-reflect on their listening learning activities outside class. This aimed to expand their strategy repertoires in a wider context of out-of-class self-directed learning (see Appendix B for a sample lesson).

Instruments

Learner diaries or reflective journals have been used relatively recently as measures to provide insights into learners' strategy use (Graham, 1997), which classroom observations and structured questionnaires may fail to capture (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). They may also reflect individuality and diversity of learners in complex, real-life language classrooms (Bailey, 1991). The data collected from learners' diaries or journals can be transcribed either by analytical and quantitative content analysis, or by narrative and qualitative interpretations

(Oxford, Lavine, Felkins, Hollaway, & Saleh, 1996). Research has suggested that keeping a reflective journal is a useful learning strategy in itself (Oxford, 1990), as it encourages learners to reflect on their strategy use and the problems encountered during the learning tasks (Goh, 2000; Huang, 2005), as well as helps learners to develop their metacognition of L2 listening (Goh & Taib, 2006; Goh, 2008). Finally, the process of keeping a reflective journal regularly over a long period encourages learners to become more autonomous (Donato & McCormick, 1994).

In this study, participants were required to keep reflective journals about their L2 listening learning activities fortnightly over the fourteen-week intervention period. Students were asked to reflect and evaluate how they had tried to comprehend the input and what they had understood right after completing their listening tasks. In order to objectively collect consistent data, participants were assigned to complete the same listening task for each of their reflective journals. These tasks were similar to the video or audio listening clips that were practiced in class sessions. Furthermore, participants were informed that the purpose of keeping reflective journals was not related to assessment, but was to help them reflect on, and evaluate, their listening development and learning progress, in order to encourage them to report honestly and without reservations (the guideline questions for the journal writing are provided in Appendix C). By structuring the data collected, students' journals could be more objectively compared and analyzed. In addition, to examine the changes over longer, and potentially more meaningful, intervals (one-month) during the SI, only the first, the middle and the last of each student's reflective journals, at weeks 2 (RJ1), 8 (RJ2) and 14 (RJ3) of the program respectively, were sampled and analyzed.

Data analysis

Participants' reflective journals were analyzed in two ways. First, the strategies that participants reported using were quantitatively coded. Furthermore, journal entries were analyzed qualitatively to understand the nature of strategy use reported by students. This twin focus not only provided a basis for comparison among individual students, but also presented a picture of the changing patterns of strategy use in terms of the overall group. The incidences of participants' strategy use from these three sets of reflective journals were coded into the preliminary strategy classification scheme (see Appendix D), and new strategies were created if they were not covered in this classification scheme. As a result,

each set of reflective journal entries formed a strategy use profile, consisting of each student's short descriptions of strategy use (see Appendix E for the sample strategy profile). All the transcripts were coded independently by the researcher and then compared with those coded by another researcher who also specialized in the field of language learner strategies. The inter-rater reliabilities for these three sets of data in weeks 2, 8, and 14 were 0.82, 0.86 and 0.80 respectively and any discrepancies found were resolved through discussion.

Results and discussion

This section addresses the study's research question, namely, how do EFL learners adjust their initial listening strategy use over time during the course of the listening SI?

Reported changes in strategy use were examined for the metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategy categories. Figures 1-3 show how many of the 31 students reported using particular strategies at the outset, middle and final stage of the SI, while Tables 1-3 show the changes in students' reported strategy use for the LP, MP and HP groups at these three points in time.

Metacognitive strategies

In the metacognitive category, as shown in Figure 1, the strategies of direct attention and selective attention were used predominately from the outset to the half-way point of SI, while the strategy utilizations of planning, monitoring and evaluation were scarcely used at the outset but emerged more dramatically from the middle to the end of the training period. In the final set of data, the whole range of metacognitive strategies were used fairly equally.

Figure 1: Metacognitive strategy use reported from students' initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals (N=31)

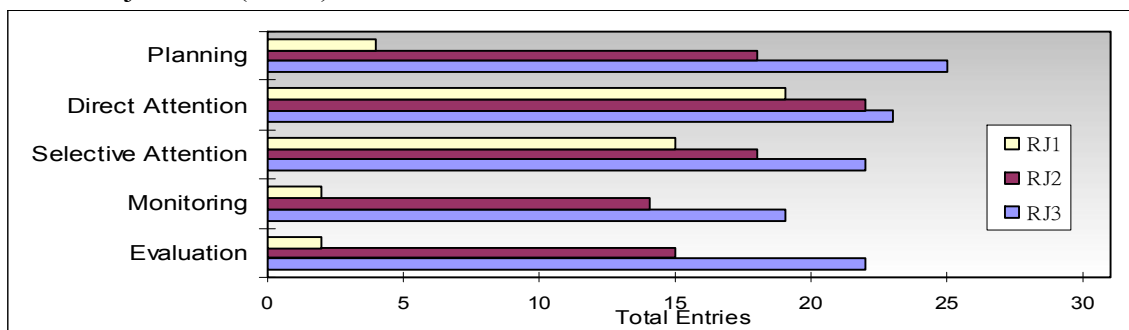


Table 1: Metacognitive strategy use reported from students' initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals for each proficiency group

	RJ1 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M	RJ2 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M	RJ3 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M
Planning	4	0.13	0	0	2	0.15	2	0.22	18	0.58	6	0.67	8	0.62	4	0.44	25	0.81	6	0.67	12	0.92	7	0.78
Directed Attention	19	0.61	4	0.44	7	0.54	8	0.89	22	0.71	7	0.78	7	0.54	8	0.89	23	0.74	8	0.89	8	0.62	7	0.78
Selective Attention	15	0.48	4	0.44	5	0.38	6	0.67	18	0.58	5	0.56	8	0.62	5	0.56	22	0.71	7	0.78	9	0.69	6	0.67
Monitoring	2	0.06	0	0	0	0	2	0.22	14	0.45	3	0.33	5	0.38	6	0.67	19	0.61	4	0.44	8	0.62	7	0.78
Evaluation	2	0.06	0	0	1	0.08	1	0.11	15	0.48	3	0.33	7	0.54	5	0.56	22	0.71	4	0.44	10	0.77	8	0.89

Table 1 shows the changes in strategy use for the students in all three proficiency groups. In general, students of these three different proficiency levels all increased their use of metacognitive strategies as the SI progressed. When further examining the mean frequencies of different proficiency levels over time, some variations in students' strategy development were found. In the first set of reflective journal (RJ1) entries, the results showed that all strategies in the metacognitive category were the most frequently used by the HP group, which corroborates the findings of other studies (Chamot, 2005; Vandergrift, 1997, 2003), and indicate that the utilizations of metacognitive strategies were likely to be the key factor differentiating more- and less-successful learners. As the listening SI proceeded, in the middle set of reflective journals (RJ2), the LP group seemed to utilize the strategy of planning most frequently, while the MP group used the strategy of selective attention most frequently among these three proficiency groups. Finally, in the final set of reflective journals (RJ3), the strategies of directed attention and selective attention were the highest used by the LP group, while the strategy of planning was the most favored by the MP group. However, the strategies of monitoring and evaluation remained the highest used by the HP group across the SI. The reasons might be that LP to MP listeners learned to manage some basic level of strategies such as planning, directed attention and selective attention through the SI. However, some more sophisticated strategies such as monitoring, which may contribute more to listening proficiency than others, might be relatively difficult to acquire and operationalize for less-proficient listeners. In addition to the wider range of use of metacognitive strategies, changes in the quality of students' metacognitive strategy use over time were also identified. At the beginning of the SI, students had very limited knowledge of metacognitive strategies, and most of them simply employed strategies of directed attention and selective attention, or what they called in their responses "listen carefully" and "pay

attention to key words”. However, as the strategy training proceeded, they were better able to deploy a wider range of strategies. In the strategy of selective attention, for example, these responses were given:

I found it useful to listen for stressed words or repeated words, and the speakers’ intonations in the dialogue were very important, too. (S22 LP RJ2 – student 22, low proficiency, second reflective journal)

I would pay attention to the transition words, such as ‘however’, ‘but’, ‘therefore’, and it helped me to connect the ideas of this announcement. (S16 MP RJ2)

This dialogue was about ‘making an appointment’. I paid attention to the relative words or key facts about what, who, why, when, where and how the speakers would meet. (S13 HP RJ3)

Students tended to become better able to articulate their strategies, and clearer about what they should specifically attend to while they were listening. Similarly, for the strategy of evaluation, at the outset, very few evaluation strategies were used among students. However, students seemed to be better able to address how they approached using this strategy, for example:

I checked how much I’ve understood by reading the English transcripts after listening (S7 LP RJ2)

After listening to the CD, I traced back what I did during the listening, then evaluated what I’ve understood in my mind first; and finally did the listening exercises to check my actual comprehension. (S17 MP RJ3)

I could understand almost 80% of the listening passage this time. I found that using planning and monitoring strategies helped me comprehend better than before. There were some small details I didn’t get it, but they didn’t affect my overall comprehension. (S4 HP RJ2)

Among metacognitive strategies, monitoring was the least employed compared to the others. Since monitoring strategies involve more indirect and complex processing, most students might not be aware of, or be able to actively manage, the monitoring strategy while listening. Their reported utilizations of monitoring strategies were mostly limited to, for example, “keeping up with speed” or “getting used to speech rate”, which suggested that students simply passively received the input, and even when they tried to be actively

involved in using strategies, they tended to use them at a basic level. Nevertheless, a few more-proficient students seemed to begin to employ the monitoring strategies at a more sophisticated level. Two HP students reported as follows:

I became more aware of my comprehension while I was listening, and then what I understood at the first part would make me understand next part better. (S30 HP RJ2)

When I didn't really understand the coming message, I would also check if it matched the overall situation. Sometimes they didn't fit in, so I would quickly change my interpretations again. (S3 HP RJ3)

Finally, as the SI continued to the end, results from the final set of strategy profiles revealed that most students seemed to be able to apply the whole range of metacognitive strategies and reported these procedures more comprehensively. For example, students stated:

If I follow the sequences of using strategies to prepare before listening, monitor comprehension during listening and evaluate after listening, I could comprehend much better. These strategies were just like a set of 'happy meal', if I didn't use one of them, then I could not understand more. (S27 MP RJ3)

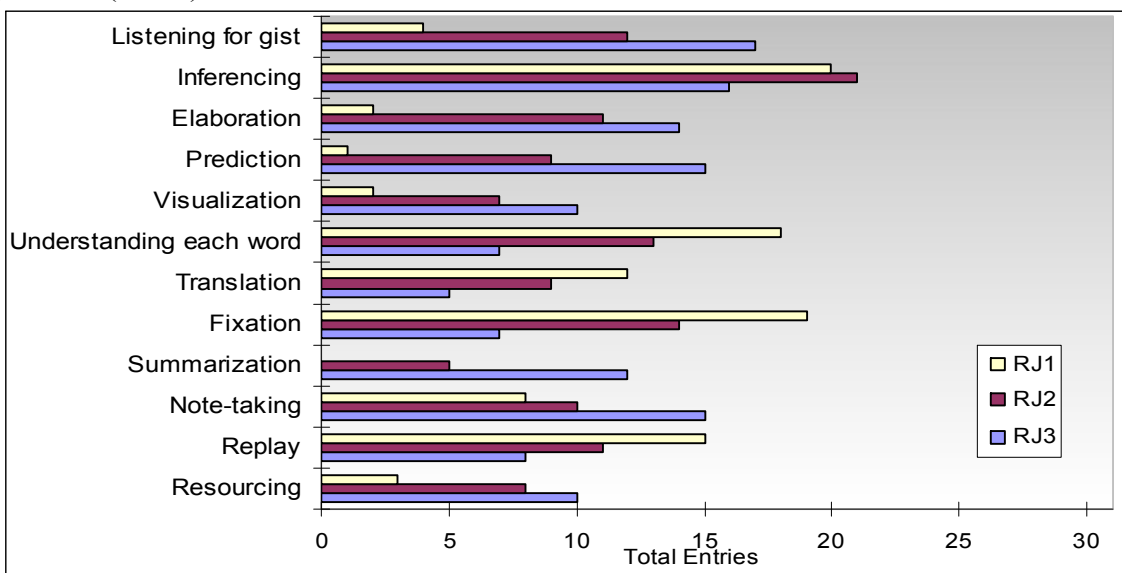
I related some possible words to prepare my mind to listen before listening; then I reminded myself what I've just heard and also attended to the coming chunks, and tried to integrate them together while listening. After listening, I would calm down for a while, and imagined for the whole picture on what and how I've comprehended the listening passage. Now I know better what I should do when I listen. (S13 HP RJ3)

These strategy entries reported by students at different times showed that students of different proficiency levels learned to gain better control over their listening processing during the SI. They not only broadened the horizons of their metacognitive strategy use, but also advanced these utilizations in a more systematic way. Furthermore, when comparing the strategy use of different proficiency levels, it was found that more-proficient listeners learned to employ metacognitive strategies of a wider range and at a more sophisticated level than their less-proficient counterparts, and thus, there was a tendency that a higher quality of strategy use seemed to be more related to higher proficiency level to some extent. These results correlate to Vandergrift's (2003) study, suggesting that the proficiency level of the learners affects the efficacy of their strategy use, and the higher the proficiency, the better integrated and utilized the listening strategies.

Cognitive strategies

In the cognitive strategy category, as shown in Figure 2, the results from the first set of reflective journals indicated that, at the outset of SI, the strategies of inferencing, understanding each word/detail, fixation and replay were the mostly commonly reported strategies being used.

Figure 2: Cognitive strategy use reported from initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals (N=31)



Most students predominantly resorted to bottom-up strategies for detailed comprehension, and only used inferencing strategies to wildly guess when comprehension broke down. Therefore, responses such as “understand word meanings carefully”, “think hard about the unfamiliar words”, “translate the words into Chinese” or “quickly guess the answer” prevailed in most students’ initial reflective journals (RJ1). Another common strategy was ‘replay’, i.e., repeated listening. For example, one LP student wrote:

I would pause sentence by sentence to understand the meaning (S21 LP RJ1).

Many students primarily persisted with decoding processes, that is, bottom-up, to decode the input word-by-word. When they couldn’t understand or missed several sentences, they simply replayed and listened again.

As students received the SI and consistently reflected on their strategy use and the problems encountered over time, it can be seen from the middle and final sets of data, that

the tendency for students to habitually use bottom-up strategies dwindled (e.g., understanding each word, translation, and fixation), while other top-down (e.g., listening for gist, prediction, and visualization) or more sophisticated strategies (e.g., summarization) emerged.

Table 2: Cognitive strategy use reported from students' initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals for each proficiency group

		RJ1 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M	RJ2 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M	RJ3 N=31	M	LP N=9	M	MP N=13	M	HP N=9	M
Cognitive Top-down Strategies	Listen for gist	4	0.13	0	0	1	0.08	3	0.33	12	0.39	1	0.11	4	0.31	7	0.78	17	0.55	3	0.33	9	0.69	5	0.56
	Inferencing	20	0.65	6	0.67	9	0.69	5	0.56	21	0.68	8	0.89	8	0.62	5	0.56	16	0.52	5	0.56	8	0.62	3	0.33
	Elaboration	2	0.06	0	0	0	0	2	0.22	11	0.35	3	0.33	4	0.31	4	0.44	14	0.45	4	0.44	4	0.31	6	0.67
	Prediction	1	0.03	0	0	0	0	1	0.11	9	0.29	1	0.11	5	0.38	3	0.33	15	0.48	2	0.22	8	0.62	5	0.56
	Visualization	2	0.06	1	0.11	1	0.08	0	0	7	0.23	1	0.11	3	0.23	3	0.33	10	0.32	4	0.44	3	0.23	3	0.33
Cognitive Bottom-up Strategies	Understand each word	18	0.58	7	0.78	9	0.69	2	0.22	13	0.42	6	0.67	4	0.31	3	0.33	7	0.23	3	0.33	3	0.23	1	0.11
	Translation	12	0.39	5	0.56	4	0.31	3	0.33	9	0.29	3	0.33	5	0.38	1	0.11	5	0.16	2	0.22	2	0.15	1	0.11
	Fixation	19	0.61	8	0.89	8	0.62	3	0.33	14	0.45	6	0.67	5	0.38	3	0.33	7	0.23	4	0.44	3	0.23	0	0
Cognitive Others	Summarization	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.16	0	0	3	0.23	2	0.22	12	0.39	2	0.22	4	0.31	6	0.67
	Note-taking	8	0.26	3	0.33	3	0.23	2	0.22	10	0.32	2	0.22	5	0.38	3	0.33	15	0.48	4	0.44	7	0.54	4	0.44
	Replay	15	0.48	7	0.78	5	0.38	3	0.33	11	0.35	5	0.56	5	0.38	1	0.11	8	0.26	4	0.44	3	0.23	1	0.11
	Resourcing	3	0.10	0	0.00	1	0.08	2	0.22	8	0.26	2	0.22	4	0.31	2	0.22	10	0.32	3	0.33	5	0.38	2	0.22

Regarding the cognitive strategy use of different proficiency levels presented in Table 2, at the outset of SI, although all participants tended to resort to bottom-up strategies, it was found that the MP to HP listeners employed top-down strategies and others like resourcing strategies the most frequently, while the LP group employed bottom-up strategies, and other strategies like note-taking and replay the most frequently. The heavier use of bottom-up strategies might to some extent be a factor in learners' ineffective listening. Higher proficiency listeners seemed to be better able to employ top-down or higher-level strategies to help them solve listening problems encountered at a decoding level and achieve successful listening. They were more flexible in their strategy repertoires and had greater control over strategy deployment. In contrast, lower proficiency listeners focused more on low-level processing and predominantly used bottom-up strategies. As a result, they were greatly hampered by a limited repertoire of strategies and their comprehension was more likely to break down at a superficial level of processing.

As the SI proceeded, in general, as pointed out above, all proficiency levels increased their use of top-down strategies such as listening for gist, elaboration, prediction, visualization and others such as summarization, note-taking and resourcing. In addition, they all decreased their use of bottom-up strategies (e.g., understanding each word, translation and fixation) and other strategies like the replay strategy. At the end of the SI, more top-down strategies such as listening for gist, inferencing, prediction and others like note-taking and resourcing were employed by the MP group the most frequently, while only the two strategies of elaboration and summarization remained as the highest used by the HP group. As for the LP group, although they used bottom-up strategies and replay strategies the most often among the three groups, they clearly decreased their use of these strategies, and they also employed visualization the most frequently. This indicates that the SI guided less-proficient listeners to employ more appropriate strategies, in the manner of their more-proficient counterparts. Therefore, the SI not only bridged the gap in strategy use between more- and less-proficient listeners, but also helped learners at different proficiency levels to better orchestrate their strategy use.

With respect to the changes of strategy use within individuals as reported in their second and third sets of reflective journals (RJ2 and RJ3), it appeared to be that individual learners of different proficiency levels began to realize the weakness of simply using bottom-up strategies to comprehend the texts, and became willing to try out more top-down strategies. Students who addressed the importance of catching every word at the beginning seemed to realize the disadvantages of just decoding the input. For example, as one MP listener (S19) stated:

Trying to understand word by word while listening was really a ‘mission impossible’. I found that I should just ignore the unfamiliar words and keep listening; otherwise I would get stuck and get panic again. (S19 MP, RJ2)

I learned to listen for the key words and key points of the contexts and keep remind me about what I’ve understood. I found that my comprehension could go faster and understand better. (S19 MP, RJ3)

Through reflecting on his own strategy use, he gradually discovered how to approach the listening texts more effectively. Therefore, to incorporate more top-down strategies might help students to cope with the complex nature of L2 listening. Another typical change was

also identified. For example, one LP listener (S1) stated in her second reflective journal:

I found it very convenient to listen to interactive CD, because I can listen to the dialogue with both English and Chinese captions, and I could stop or repeat at anytime. (S1 LP RJ2)

She tended to apply her habitual learning methods of grammar-translation to practice listening, believing that it might be useful for her comprehension in spoken input. However, through discussions in class and self-revelations outside class over time, she then altered her strategy use, trying not to rely on Chinese captions, and she reported in her final reflective journal that:

I turned both Chinese and English captions off and listen to what the speakers said very carefully. I would listen for the whole dialogue continuously for two times to practice my comprehension, and tried to think only in English. (S1 LP RJ3)

While most LP to MP students mentioned altering their bottom-up strategies, a few MP to HP students resorted to more sophisticated strategies. One HP listener (S11) reported on learning to use the summarization strategy:

I usually just keep alert on how much I've comprehended, but I tried to use my own words to summarize mentally after I listened to this short dialogue. It helped me to reinforce on what I've understood. (S11 HP RJ2)

After listening to a paragraph, I would quickly organize the main points so that I could easily remember. Then when I continue to the following parts, I could still trace back what had mentioned in the beginning. I found this strategy very useful for comprehending long listening passages. (S11 HP RJ3)

It seemed that this student managed to cope with the listening input effectively. Likewise, through self-revelations and self-directedness, the HP group students also learned to have better control over their listening processes, trying out and further advancing their application of strategies.

These cited examples reveal that students at different proficiency levels seemed to have benefited from the SI to some extent. While some students just started to raise their strategic awareness, others began to alter their habitual strategy use, and still others resorted to even

higher-level or more sophisticated strategy use. Through class discussions and individuals' reflections on their own strategy use over time, it can be seen that each student progressed in the way which best suited him/herself.

Social/Affective strategies

Regarding the social/affective category (see Figure 3), since most students performed out-of-class listening activities alone and they mainly dealt with one-way listening tasks, fewer social strategies were employed. In contrast, the utilizations of affective strategies were reported to have increased more dramatically.

Figure 3: Social/Affective strategy use reported from initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals (N=31)

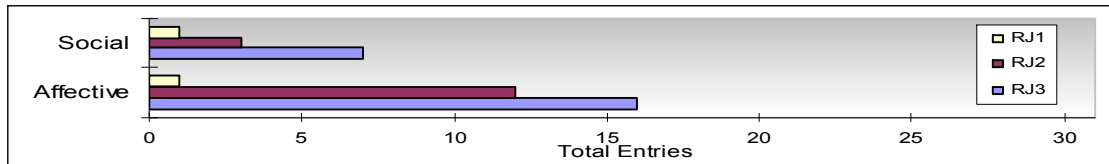


Table 3: Social/Affective strategy use reported from students' initial, middle and final sets of reflective journals for each proficiency group

	RJ1 N=31		LP N=9		MP N=13		HP N=9		RJ2 N=31		LP N=9		MP N=13		HP N=9		RJ3 N=31		LP N=9		MP N=13		HP N=9	
	M		M		M		M		M		M		M		M		M		M		M		M	
Social	1	0.03	0	0	1	0.08	0	0	3	0.10	1	0.11	2	0.15	0	0	7	0.23	2	0.22	3	0.23	2	0.22
Affective	1	0.03	0	0	0	0	1	0.11	12	0.39	3	0.33	7	0.54	2	0.22	16	0.52	8	0.89	5	0.38	3	0.33

When examining the strategy changes for each proficiency level, regarding affective strategies, it was noted that they received the highest use by the LP and MP groups at the middle and final stage of SI respectively. The reasons might be that LP to MP students were less-proficient listeners, and they might have encountered more listening obstacles while comprehending the input. They may have decided to employ more affective strategies to keep calm during listening compared to their more-proficient counterparts. Affective strategies could also have helped students strengthen their own ability to cope with their fear of the unknown in the input and with the obstacles which occurred while they were performing listening tasks. Generally, students reported that they would take a deep breath before listening. They would keep calm when they were unable to comprehend, and would keep going while listening. In addition, they tried to be satisfied with their progress, or tried

to be confident of dealing with more advanced listening tasks. Therefore, the results showed that the listening SI had encouraged students to employ affective strategies to a greater extent.

In summary, some patterns of learners' strategy development during the process of the SI were revealed. First, regarding changes in strategy use in three main categories, in the metacognitive category, the results show that students became better able to employ a wider range of and more sophisticated metacognitive strategies, which enabled them to have better control over their listening and to employ strategies more effectively. With increasing awareness and strategy use, in the cognitive category, students seemed to shift their strategy use from a bottom-up level to a more top-down level which thus enabled students achieve more effective comprehension. In addition, students employed more affective strategies to build their confidence. Once they became more confident in dealing with their listening tasks, they were more likely to optimize their learning to achieve greater success. Therefore, it was found that students, step by step, were developing a better quality, and higher degree of, strategy usage. Second, regarding the stages of acquiring strategies, results showed that students shifted from stages of greater strategic awareness to conscious control of strategies. As students began to realize the weakness of their habitual strategy use, they were more willing to consciously employ new strategies to help them cope with difficulties occurring. Once they evaluated the effectiveness of these new strategies, they began to familiarize themselves with these usages more systematically, and finally adopted them into their strategy repertoires. Furthermore, it was noted that while a given strategy was reported as effective for some students, it might be perceived as ineffective by others. This may be attributed to students' individual differences (i.e., listening proficiency, linguistic or background knowledge and affective factors) in approaching strategies (Graham, Santos, & Vanderplank, 2008; Vandergrift, 2003). Nevertheless, students seemed to follow the stages just described to develop their strategy repertoires, but at a different pace. Finally, with respect to the strategy changes for different proficiency groups, at the outset of the SI, it was found that HP students employed more sophisticated strategies more frequently than the LP ones, and thus, a wider and better quality of strategy use seemed to be more related to the HP level. As the SI proceeded, many examples in students' second and third sets of reflective journals (RJ2 and RJ3) indicated that the listening SI was beneficial to students of different proficiency levels to some extent. Individuals appeared to be able to find their own

way to success, and lower achievers seemed to follow the routes to success which higher achievers had already completed, i.e., from passively receiving input to being actively involved in listening, from using limited mechanical strategies to employing a wider range of integrated strategies, and each one progressed in a way which best suited him/herself.

As a result of SI, some insights into how students adapted their strategy use were revealed. Through consistent strategy modeling and discussion in class, students were provided with successful evidence of using strategies to improve comprehension. The performance checklist for strategy use conducted in class practice also helped to support students' learning of listening strategies. Moreover, through self-reflections outside class, students were better able to reflect on their own strategy use, listening difficulties and other individual factors, which helped them to find their own individual way to success.

Conclusion and implications

Before concluding, some limitations of the present study need to be mentioned. First of all, this study was carried out in a classroom-based setting, where the participants were only one intact class in one technological college and were not more broadly selected. In addition, with relatively small group, it is difficult to objectively differentiate proficiency groups clearly. Therefore, a larger population using randomized selection for future research in listening strategy training is strongly suggested. Second, this study mainly employed one type of instrument – reflective journals to explore students' strategy development over time; however, other methods such as interviews could have been usefully included for triangulation, so as to elicit more objective and comprehensive findings.

Overall, the findings of the present study show that there appear to be positive changes in students' strategy use in enhancing their listening processing as a result of SI and writing reflective journals. Therefore, it is suggested that there needs to be a shift in conventional listening instruction where a test-oriented approach predominates. Research has indicated that the more emphasis there is on testing as the goal of listening instruction, the more prescriptive teaching and passive learning there tends to be (Wang, 2002). As a result, students have been prevented from developing effective listening strategies and from understanding and activating their listening in a L2. This study of SI has attempted to address these aspects.

Based on the results of the present study, a number of pedagogical implications for

listening SI are suggested. First, both teachers' and students' perceptions of listening instruction need to be changed. It needs to be recognized that listening instruction is no longer simply testing listening or word-for-word decoding of listening content. Integrated SI holds promise for effective listening pedagogy. Although the effects of helping learners to develop effective listening strategies may not have as immediate an effect as cramming learners with practice listening questions to get higher testing scores, the findings of this study have provided convincing evidence that SI can help learners to reach their long-term goal of developing into more autonomous listeners, which can facilitate listening outside the classroom. Second, consistent and systematic SI integrated into listening instruction is recommended. The results of this study suggest that the teacher needs to play an active role in implementing SI at the initial stage, especially in relatively conventional listening classrooms. The teacher can adapt the systematic strategy training procedures suggested from research to develop students' metacognition. These procedures have been shown to empower learners in executing better control over their listening, to expand and fine tune their own strategy repertoire and in turn, to approach their listening tasks more successfully. Furthermore, it is crucial to help students develop integrated strategy use of both bottom-up and top-down strategies in coping with different task demands. When listening strategy training is conducted, the responsibilities of learning to listen will gradually shift to learners themselves through self-reflection on, and self-regulation of their listening in the L2. Fourth, as the results indicate, different students progress at different rates in their learning of strategies to improve listening performances. To capture these individual differences, multiple approaches to evaluating students' listening performance are recommended in L2 listening classrooms. One alternative assessment is to implement reflective journals on a regular basis. It not only encourages students to self-assess and self-direct their own listening process more systematically, but also provides the teacher with deeper insights into students' problems or efforts in learning to listen. This, in turn, can help close the gap between what is taught and what learners need. Finally, curriculum support for explicit and integrated strategy training is strongly needed. Since learning to listen is a slow and long-term process, it is suggested that explicit strategy training needs to be integrated into the listening instruction curriculum to maximize systematic positive outcomes over the longer term. By doing so, students' acquisition of effective listening strategies and self-directed learning in listening can be more fully cultivated. Only with collaboration among students,

teachers, and policy or curriculum authorities in Taiwan will listening strategy training be effectively and successfully implemented in regular listening instruction. In doing so, there is great potential to reach the ultimate goal of facilitating autonomy in L2 listening for Taiwanese college students.

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Appendix A

Performance Checklist for Listening Strategies Adapted from Vandergrift (1999) and Harris (2007)

What listening strategies have you used for the listening task that you just completed?
Check the strategy that you have just used.

Before listening:	Yes
I check that I understand the task I have to do	
I look carefully at the title and any pictures to see if I can guess what it will be about	
I try to predict the words I am likely to hear or what it is likely to be said in this passage	
I decide on the key words or what I must pay attention to in advance	
I am ready to concentrate on what I am about to hear	
I encourage myself	
While listening:	Yes
I listen for the information needed to accomplish the task	
I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding	
I use key words, cognates or word families to understand the text	
I use my knowledge of the context and of text structure to understand the text	
I try to get the main idea first and then details	
I listen out for specific details like the name of people, place, time and event	
I attempt to verify my predictions and then revise my predictions accordingly	
I make picture of what is said or the spellings of words in my mind	
I use background noises, tone of voice, and other clues to help me guess at the meaning of words I did not understand	
I try to use grammatical clues to decide what kind of a word it is – a noun, verb, etc	
I try to quickly look for familiar content words that show in written questions	
If I don't understand, I use my knowledge or experience to guess what I have worked out so far	
If I don't understand one part, I listen out for the next parts to fill out that information	
I break the stream of sounds down into individual words and write them down to see if they are like words I know	
I quickly jot down key words or important concepts to remember the whole part	
I skip over words that I do not understand so that I don't miss what is said next	
I don't panic when there is something I don't understand but I keep on listening	
After listening:	Yes
I check back to see if my interpretation were right and made sense	
I try to remember key points and mentally summarize everything in order	
I evaluate the logic of what I understood	
I check how much I could understand this time	
I reflect my problems encountered during the listening task	

Appendix B

Sample Listening Strategy Instruction Lesson

Week 6

Focus Listening strategies: Prediction, Using background knowledge (Elaboration)

Review Listening strategies: Metacognitive strategies (e.g., planning, monitoring and evaluation)

Language objective: Understand a long listening text and answer comprehension questions.

Strategy objective: Use strategies of prediction and using background knowledge to prepare for and check understanding of a listening text.

Materials: Copies of two listening texts and comprehension questions, handout of strategy tips

Procedures:

Strategic-awareness raising

1. Review the strategies that have been introduced in the previous weeks.

Brainstorming:

Ask students to brainstorm what they can do to help themselves understand before, during, and after listening. Then write students' responses on the board by making a chart, so that students can review and reinforce what strategies they've learned to deal with listening tasks.

Before listening	During listening	After listening
- quickly look at the title/pictures/questions	- keep up with speed	- answer the text questions to check my comprehension
- prepare my mind to concentrate	-give very quick response	- think about my problems in understating this passage
- ...	-check my comprehension fits in with the situation or not	-
- ...	- ...	-...
	-...	

2. Most students may encounter many problems when they need to answer several comprehension questions right after listening to a long conversation or passage. Ask students what problems do they have and what they usually do to deal with this situation. Make a list of students' ideas on the board. Review and discuss on students' list.

Demonstration:

1. Present the focus two strategies – *predication* and *using background knowledge* by defining the strategies, giving examples and explaining why and when these two strategies are useful. Write the key information on the board.
2. Model the two strategies by thinking aloud. Write some key ideas by using mind-mapping on the board.
3. Ask students to comment on the teacher's think-aloud of using strategy of *prediction* and *using background knowledge*.
4. Ask students to recall the steps for answering the comprehension questions. Elicit the strategies and make a small handout to each student.

Before listening

☆ Predicting by looking at the title or picture

☆ Using the question words to build background information and knowledge

1. Find the question word in the question (who, what, where, when, why, or how)

2. Identify what type of information you will need to find to answer the question (person, place, event, time, reason, or procedure)

While listening

- ☆ Selectively attending to the text for the answer
- ☆ Predicting what is going to mention in the next part
- ☆ Relating personal experience to the listening text
- ☆ Checking the answer against what you know to determine if the answer makes sense.

After listening

- Evaluate your comprehension and strategy use

Practice:

1. Have students practice another listening task with several comprehension questions and remind them to use the process the teacher demonstrated.
2. Have students in pairs, allow them to listen the listening task again. Then they can review their work on the comprehension questions and revise any answers that are incorrect. After that, ask students to verbalize their thinking processes during the task with each other and how they get the answer (either correct or incorrect). At this point, students have chances to discuss, either finding out their problems of getting wrong answer, or sharing their processes of successful comprehension.

Evaluation:

Have the class discuss the focus strategies and evaluate their effectiveness.

Ask students if and how the strategies of *prediction* and *using background knowledge* helped them and if they would use them again. Ask them to discuss difficulties they had using the strategies or suggestions for using it.

Self-directed practice:

For homework, assign students a longer text to listen. Students need to complete the reflective journal to self-observe and self-reflect on their listening strategies during the listening task. This aims to expand and orchestrate their strategy repertoires to deal with listening tasks more effectively.

Appendix C

Reflective Journal

Theme topic:

Movies / TV news broadcast / Radio programs / Listening to the English lecture / Interactive learning CD-Rom / Conversation with English speakers /

I. Write about the listening activity which you've just completed. For each situation, try to reflect on what you were doing for the listening event, and write into paragraphs for each question that listed below.

1. What was the listening event?

2. How sure are you that you understand the listening task?

0 -----1----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Not Somewhat Kind Very Completely
sure unsure of sure sure sure

3. What did you do to understand as much of it as possible?

4. What difficulties did you encounter while you were listening to the task?

5. What are the methods or strategies you have found effective for this task?

6. What are the methods or strategies that do not work for you?

II. Give yourself a learning estimate for your learning in listening for the past two weeks. (e.g., expanding strategy use, using strategies more effectively, or better understanding of the listening passage)

0 -----1----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Not Somewhat Kind of Very Completely
Successful

III. What do you plan to do to practice your listening for the next two weeks?

Appendix D

Listening Strategies Classification Scheme

Based on Vandergrift (1997) and Goh (2002)

Cognitive Strategies

Top-down processing

1. Listen for gist

- Listen for main ideas first

2. Inferencing (Filling in missing information and guessing meaning of words)

- Use contextual clues
- Use information from familiar content words
- Draw on knowledge of the world
- Apply knowledge about the target language
- Use visual clues

3. Elaboration (Embellishing an initial interpretation to make it meaningful and complete)

- Draw on knowledge of the world
- Draw on knowledge about the target language

4. Prediction (Anticipating the contents of a text)

- Anticipate general contents (global)
- Anticipate details while listening (local)

5. Visualization (Forming a mental picture of what is heard)

- Imagine scenes, events, objects etc. being described
- Mentally display the shape (spelling) of key words

Bottom-up processing

6. Understanding each word and detail

- Try to figure out the meanings of most of words or sentences of the input.
- Try to understand most of the details of the input

7. Translation (Changing words, phrases or sentences into L1 before interpretation)

- Find L1 equivalents for selected key words
- Translate a sequence of utterances

8. Fixation (Focusing attention on understanding a small part of text)

- Stop to think about the meaning of words or parts of the input
- Memorize / repeat the sounds of unfamiliar words

Cognitive

9. Summarization

- Organise important information in my mind.

10. Note-taking

- Write down key words and concepts while listening

Metacognitive Strategies

1. Planning (Preparing mentally and emotionally for a listening task)

- Preview contents
- Rehearse sounds of potential content words

2. Directed Attention (Monitoring attention and avoiding distractions)

- Concentrate hard
- Continue to listen in spite of difficulty

3. Selective Attention (Decide in advance to listen for specific aspects of input)

- Decide in advance to:
 - Listen for familiar content words
 - Notice how information is structured (e.g. discourse markers)
 - Pay attention to repetitions
 - Notice intonation features (e.g. falling and rising tones)

4. Monitoring (checking/ confirming understanding while listening)

- Confirm that comprehension has taken place
 - Identify words or ideas not understood
 - Check current interpretation with the context of the message
 - Check current interpretation with prior knowledge
- ##### **5. Evaluation** (Checking interpretation of accuracy, completeness and acceptability after listening)
- Check interpretation against external sources
 - Check interpretation using prior knowledge
 - Match interpretation with the context of the message

Social/ Affective Strategies

1. Cooperation

- Ask for explanation / clarification

2. Confidence Building (encouraging oneself)

- Tell oneself to relax
- Use positive self-talk

Appendix E First Strategy Use Profile

Item No.	Strategy	Metacognitive				Cognitive - top-down				Cognitive - bottom-up				Cognitive - others				Score	Scale	
		Planning	Monitoring	Search & Selection	Use of Resources	Goal Setting	Monitoring	Elaboration	Problem Solving	Goal Setting	Monitoring	Elaboration	Problem Solving	Goal Setting	Monitoring	Elaboration	Problem Solving			
81	1																			
82	2																			
83	3																			
84	4																			
85	5																			
86	6																			
87	7																			
88	8																			
89	9																			
90	10																			
91	11																			
92	12																			
93	13																			
94	14																			
95	15																			
96	16																			
97	17																			
98	18																			
99	19																			
100	20																			
101	21																			
102	22																			
103	23																			
104	24																			
105	25																			
106	26																			
107	27																			
108	28																			
109	29																			
110	30																			
111	31																			

Plagiarism by Turkish Students: Causes and Solutions

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Bio Data:

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Abstract

Much has been written about plagiarism but mostly about the definition, detection, and deterrence (Austin and Brown 1999; "Avoiding Plagiarism" 2005; Barry 2006; Block 2001; Coulthard 2006; Park 2003). Few researchers have surveyed or interviewed second/foreign language students to find about the causes that they plagiarize. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study is to identify causes of plagiarism among Turkish students and propose possible solutions. The study has used semi-structured interviews as the instrument of data collection. Six Turkish students--two from senior high school and four from college--participated in the study. The results show that the two most prevalent causes of plagiarism among the students interviewed were students' lack of awareness about plagiarism and students' lack of knowledge about writing research papers. All students interviewed were assigned papers to write in different courses, such as Biology, Turkish, English, History, to mention a few, in high school; nevertheless, the students claimed that they were taught neither what plagiarism meant nor how to develop and structure a research paper. In addition to these two perceived causes of plagiarism, three other causes were found: students' lack of motivation to do research, students' lack of freedom to express their opinions or use their own voices, and instructors' negative attitude towards writing as well as low expectations from students. To prevent plagiarism or reduce the number of plagiarized papers written by Turkish students, four specific solutions are offered: students should be informed about the use of available software and search engines that detect plagiarism; students should be taught about plagiarism and its consequences; students should be encouraged to choose interesting current topics for their research papers; and writing instructors should adapt their methodology to help students to avoid plagiarism.

Key words: definition of plagiarism; causes of plagiarism; solutions to plagiarism; plagiarism and Turkish students

Introduction

Plagiarism has been defined as “a form of cheating in which the student **tries to pass off someone else’s work as his own. . . . Typically, substantial passages are ‘lifted’ verbatim from a particular source without proper attribution** having been made,” according to The University of Birmingham (as cited in Coulthard, 2006, para. 3) [emphasis in original], “cut and paste” (McCabe, 2003, p. 4) writing, “patchwriting” (Howard, 2001b, para. 3). Howard (2001b) explains that in “patchwriting” “the student . . . [blends] his or her prose with unattributed phrases and sentences from a source” (para. 3). Plagiarism has become the focus of many academic discussions perhaps because of the availability of the Internet to a growing number of learners. However, plagiarism is not a new plague. In the 1980s, for example, writing instructors, including the researcher, were not concerned with today’s plagiarism, the Internet plagiarism. Instructors’ concern tended to be with students who paid someone to write out-of-class papers for them. Instructors had more control over their students’ writing than they do today. Those who were experienced and had had the same students for two consecutive semesters were able to recognize students’ writing style and voices, as well as identify changes in style that indicated that a paper had been plagiarized. Yet, instructors who were inexperienced could ask students to do what Fisher and Hill (2004) suggested: “. . . ask students for a writing sample, put it on file, [and] alert the students that this . . . [would] serve as a barometer for their upcoming paper” (p. 18).

In the late 1990s, when the researcher taught Technical Writing, the second semester of freshman composition, to Electrical/Electronics Engineering majors at Eskisehir Osmangazi University in Turkey, she was convinced that her students would not pay other people to write their out-of-class papers. At that time, English was not known by many Turkish people as it is today. Moreover, few Turkish students were familiar with the Internet. However, students systematically conducted research in the library, and the researcher was unaware of how much of the information students used in their papers came from sources not listed in their references. She was concerned with “cut and paste” (McCabe, 2003, p. 4) writing and “patchwriting” (Howard, 2001b, para. 3).

For the past six years, however, the Internet has been an integral part of Turkish students’ lives; regrettably, plagiarism has become a threat to students and instructors because today’s Turkish students are knowledgeable about the Internet. Being engineering majors, the

students attending the Electrical/Electronics Engineering Department are computer experts, making instructors' battle with plagiarism hard to combat. In the fall 2006, the researcher decided to investigate Turkish students' writing practices before they entered college. Thus, through a tape-recorded interview, she collected data on students' writing practices in high school. Based on preliminary findings, she searched for solutions that could help to deter plagiarism among Turkish students.

Literature Review

Many research articles define plagiarism, provide clues for its detection, and make suggestions on its prevention (Bogdanowicz, 2007; DeVoss and Rosati, 2002; Duggan, 2006; Howard, 2007; Lake, 2004; Leask, 2006; Logue, 2004; Lyon, Barrett, and Malcolm, 2006; MacDonald and Carroll, 2006; Marsh, 2004; McGowan, 2003; McKeever, 2006); however, what these articles fail to do is to focus exclusively on Turkish students' causes for plagiarizing. Admittedly, a few articles can be found on surveys that concentrate on why English language learners or foreign language students plagiarize, but their participants rarely include Turkish students. To illustrate, Deckert's (1993) surveyed 170 first-year and 41 third-year Chinese students majoring in sciences at universities in Hong Kong. The first-year students had never taken classes that informed them about plagiarism. Deckert's results indicated that the first-year students were unaware of the Western concept of plagiarism and were not concerned with authorship; nevertheless, they were worried about the harmful consequences plagiarism would have on learning. On the other hand, the third-year students were familiar with the concept of plagiarism, and were concerned both with authorship and students' dishonesty. Deckert concluded that the first-year students needed to be taught how to avoid plagiarism (pp. 131-148).

In addition, Pecorari's (2003) studied 17 foreign graduate students from different countries, attending three British universities. There is no information about students' nationality, only their first name, but it is possible to identify one Turkish national. Students' writings were analyzed and similarities among their papers and the sources were found. Pecorari concluded that plagiarism was unintentional, though. What Pecorari suggested was that students be taught about plagiarism (pp. 317-345). Also, Yakovchuk (2006) surveyed international students (no country identified) attending the pre-session course in Academic English of the Center for English Language Teacher Education, University of Warwick, on

reasons they plagiarized. Yakovchuk found ten reasons students plagiarized: “content problems,” “laziness,” “language problems,” “desire for a better product,” “lack of awareness,” “work management,” “lack of confidence,” “deliberate choice,” “de-motivating task,” and “lack of resources.” Yakovchuk invited instructors teaching English for Academic Purposes to think of questions related mostly to skills students’ need and to the structure of assignments that are motivating enough for the specific group of students to deter plagiarism (pp. 100-101).

Moreover, Devlin and Gray (2007) interviewed 56 Australian university students on reasons they plagiarized. What they found was that the students plagiarized for several reasons: “institutional admission criteria; student understanding of plagiarism; poor academic skills; a range of teaching and learning factors; personality factors; and external pressures.” The results were consistent with those found by other researchers who worked with participants from Australasia and the implication was in terms of reducing plagiarism (p. 181).

Despite the results found in studies conducted on causes of plagiarism among students thus far, many more studies using international students from different parts of the world, especially from Turkey, are needed to better understand the reasons international students plagiarize. Would the causes found by the research reviewed here be the same ones uncovered by the present study?

Research Design and Methodology

To conduct this study, the following questions were posed:

1. What causes plagiarism among Turkish students?
2. What are some possible solutions to plagiarism?

To investigate the first question, the semi-structured interview approach was utilized. Semi-structured interview is neither the “informal conversational interview” (Patton 2002, p. 342) also called unstructured interview, according to Fontana and Frey 2000 (as cited in Patton 2002, p.342) nor the “standardized open-ended interview” (Patton 2002, p. 344) or structured interview. Semi-structured interview combines the two approaches: structured and unstructured interviews. Unlike the structured interview, it allows the interviewer to have flexibility while he/she conducts the interview: He/she can decide “. . . when it is appropriate

to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument's development" (Patton 2002, p. 347). Moreover, Wengraf (2002) affirms that in semi-structured interview ". . . questions are only partially prepared in advance (semi-structured) and will therefore be largely improvised by . . . [the] interviewer" (p. 3).

In this study, although the researcher started all interviews with the same questions for interview consistency-- What kind of writing assignments did you do in high school? Why did you write these assignments? What did teachers expect from you when they gave you these assignments?--she allowed the participants to share their perspectives on the subject. Also, she asked participants new questions whenever she thought necessary to clarify a point, to have more information about certain topics, and/or to explore new ideas.

As far as participants were concerned, six participants took part in the study: two senior high school students (mean age=16) and four freshman students from the Electrical/Electronics Engineering Department of Eskisehir Osmangazi University in Turkey (mean age = 20.7). The younger high school student was finishing the freshman year; the older one, the senior year. All college freshmen were taking the first college writing course (Expository Writing in English); they had not taken Technical Writing, the second freshman writing course that teaches research paper skills. Nevertheless, all participants had written several research papers in high school, including papers for their English courses. The specific students were selected to take part in the study because of their willingness to participate and their fluency in English.

To seek for answers to the second question -- What are some possible solutions to plagiarism? -- the data collected on causes of plagiarism among Turkish students were analyzed.

Data Analysis and Results

Once the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed, codes were written. The codes generated themes which helped to answer the first research question: What causes plagiarism among Turkish students? The causes of plagiarism were identified as the following:

1. Lack of awareness about plagiarism

According to the participants in the present study, they were unaware about plagiarism. During the interview, the senior high school student looked up the meaning of plagiarism in a Turkish dictionary and affirmed that he had never heard the word before in English or in Turkish. Deckert's (1993) study showed that first-year college students in Hong Kong did not know about plagiarism either (p. 131) whereas Percorari's (2006) investigation revealed that the students who plagiarized did it unintentionally (p. 317). Besides, one of the participants in Devlin and Gray's (2007) study mentioned that some foreign students plagiarized due to "lack of understanding about plagiarism" (p. 188). Thus, lack of awareness about plagiarism and ignorance are the major causes of plagiarism.

2. Lack of knowledge about writing research papers

If participants plagiarized unintentionally, as both Percorari (2006) and Yakovchuk (2006) suggested in their studies, participants in the present study appear to acknowledge that they plagiarize because they lack the necessary tools and skills to write research papers. According to five participants, writing research papers was never formally explained to them. One of the college freshmen (Student A) made the statement below and Student B, who came to the interview with Student A, agreed:

"I wrote papers for different courses in mid and high school, but I never knew what to do."

Afterwards, Student A added:

"My teachers told me that writing a paper required talent, but I did not have talent. We can write if we are taught how to write because there must be rules to be followed."

Some students were sure that by copying, or cutting and pasting from sources, they were doing what they were expected to be doing as long as they listed references at the end of the paper. They further pointed out that they never included any citations in the paper. The freshman from high school said:

"They [the teachers] just gave us the topics for us to write the papers, gave us time to write the papers, and that's all."

From the statement above, it can be concluded that no formal explanation on how to write research papers has ever been provided to the students, thereby leading them to plagiarize.

“Lack of Awareness” was one category listed in Yakovchuk’s (2006) study on reasons foreign students plagiarized. What Yakovchuk meant was that the students did not know about any “referencing conventions” and were “involved in unacknowledged copying” (pp. 100-101). In the current study, lack of knowledge about the necessary skills to write research papers led participants to plagiarize.

3. *Lack of motivation to do research*

The participants in the current study thought that there was no point in doing more than they did as far as research papers were concerned because they were certain that their teachers did not bother to read their papers. As long as their papers looked good in appearance, students believed that they would obtain a good score. Also, instructors would choose topics for the research papers. If participants received topics that were not appealing to them, they had no choice but to write the paper.

“De-motivating task” was one of the categories found in Yakovchuk’s (2006) study. She explained this category as relating to “lack of interest in the assigned topic” (p. 101). Lack of motivation to write research papers as seen by the participants in this study had to do with teachers’ lack of interest in the students’ research paper and the students’ lack of opportunity to select the topics for their own research papers.

4. *Lack of freedom to express their opinions or use their own voices*

Most writing instructors appreciate it when students express their opinions well, when students restate correctly a writer’s words in their own words--that is to say, when students use their own voices. Others, in contrast, do not seem to comprehend what that means. Student A said:

“You don’t write well when you’re limited. When you’re free, your writing comes out well because you express yourself. . . . I wanted to be radical but I couldn’t. You do what they [teachers] expect you to do to get a [passing] grade.”

In other words, Student A and his peers had no incentive to do more than the bare minimum: go to the Internet and find papers on the topic the teacher assigned; then, copy an entire paper changing a few words here and there, or cut and paste from several sources. According to the participants, what was relevant was the grade they would receive for a *good looking paper*. The senior high school student corroborated this idea:

“Students are not allowed to use their own voices when writing papers.”

From the statements above, it is understood that the participants’ choices of topic and ways to approach the topic were not taken into consideration, making the participants feel that they had no freedom to express their ideas.

5. Instructors’ negative attitude towards writing as well as low expectations from students

When instructors fail to exhibit positive attitudes towards writing research papers, they rarely expect their students to spend time on their research papers. There may be a correlation between the way instructors behave and the way students respond to instructors’ behavior, as Student A suggested:

“Plagiarism is related to teachers’ expectations, behavior, and students’ reaction.”

All college students in this study doubted that their teachers could teach writing. Student A affirmed:

“Maybe they [teachers] don’t know how to teach writing. I think the training they get is not enough to teach us how to write.”

The senior high school student said:

“I don’t think they [instructors] know how to write or teach writing, and that’s why they can’t expect anything from us.”

None of the participants blamed instructors for not demanding more from students. They thought the educational system should be held responsible for failing to prepare all instructors to teach writing. When instructors cannot teach writing, they may not know what to expect from students. Thus, instructors’ negative low expectations from students’ writings may encourage plagiarism. Both Dant (1986) and Schab (1972) agreed that high school teachers working in the USA a few decades ago encouraged students “to copy from sources without acknowledgement.” When students entered college, the problem persisted (as cited in Logue 2004, p. 42).

While some of the causes of plagiarism found by Deckert (1993), Pecorari (2003), Yakovchuk (2006), and Devlin and Gray (2007) were validated in this study, the last two

causes found in the present study--lack of freedom to express their opinions or lack of encouragement to use their own voices, and instructors' negative attitude towards writing and low expectations from students-- were not uncovered by any of the researchers mentioned in this study.

What this study revealed is that as a result of the problems faced by the Turkish students when writing research papers in high school, they resorted to plagiarism: copying, "cutting and pasting" (McCabe 2003, p. 4) writing, and "patchwriting" (Howard, 2001b, para. 3) from sources. Consequently, Turkish students need to be taught how to avoid plagiarism not only while they are in high school but also when they enter college. Thus, the following solutions are offered:

1. Inform students about the use of available software and search engines that detect plagiarism

Instructors should inform students that it is possible to identify partially or totally plagiarized research papers with the help of *Turnitin*, *ithenticate*, and *EVE2*. Moreover, instructors can use the same search engines students utilize while they work on their papers. In fact, a professor who teaches Technical Writing at the Electrical/Electronics Engineering Department of Eskisehir Osmangazi University justified the low grades in his course: "I used Google. I picked exact phrases and placed them in the search box. Some [students] did cut and paste from different articles or reduce articles" [they found on the Internet] (H.H. Erkaya, personal communication, August 25, 2006).

2. Inform students about plagiarism and its consequences

Instructors should enlighten students about plagiarism and the punishments given to plagiarists from day one of their course until the time students are ready to write the final drafts of their papers. Many universities have information about plagiarism and its consequences in the students' university catalog. Taking the catalog to class and discussing the information with students should be a part of the introduction to the course and a reminder afterwards.

3. Encourage students to select interesting current topics

If students do not know where to find interesting current topics, instructors should inform

students about electronic newspapers and magazines, such as *Cable News Network (CNN)*, *Scientific American*, and others that have topics in different areas. Instructors should discourage popular topics, such as Causes of AIDS, since essays on these topics are easy to find on the Internet, thus facilitating plagiarism. Some researchers (Fisher and Hill, 2003, p. 18; Leverett and Moody, 2006, para. 11; Martin, 1992, p. 20) have said that when instructors permit students to write research papers on well-known topics, instructors encourage students to plagiarize.

Once students select their topic, they can discuss with the instructor what they plan to do, voicing their (students') own opinion on how the topic should be approached. Instructors should help students to choose approaches that give them the opportunity to be creative in order to utilize their own voices. In reporting on what he did to help students to choose topics for research papers and write good research papers, Broskoske (2005) said he informed his students how lawyers prepared themselves before they went to court, what lawyers did during the time they were presenting their cases in court, and how lawyers presented their final arguments as “. . . frame their case (define their topic), search out evidence (search for sources), present the evidence (write the paper), and make the closing argument (draw a conclusion)” (p. 4).

Nevertheless, if instructors structure the assignments, they should avoid asking students to write reports. Hamalainen (2007) has mentioned in her article that reports contribute to plagiarism. She believed that instructors should create “assignments with a twist,” assignments in which students use argumentation or persuasion (pp. 40-41).

4. Adapt the methodology to help to prevent plagiarism

In order to help students to avoid plagiarism, instructors must provide students with research tools and skills—paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing, to name a few--students need to write research papers. Although Barry (2006) indicated how helpful practicing paraphrasing was for the participants in her study in order to understand some aspects of plagiarism, the students were not able to understand “all aspects of plagiarism” (p. 378). Teaching students how to paraphrase is a small part of the entire package students need to avoid plagiarism. Campbell (1990, p. 211), and Johns and Mayers (1990, p. 253) stated that paraphrasing, along with summarizing and quoting would help students to learn how to blend information into their writing. Appendices A, B, and C illustrate what students need to know in order to

paraphrase. For information on summarizing, quoting, synthesizing, and blending references, instructors should consult Lester's (1993) and other similar textbooks.

Once instructors finish teaching students research paper skills, students should start working on the first drafts of their research papers. The work on the first draft should be done step-by-step in class. Hamalainen (2007) agreed that students should be supervised while they write their papers. She affirmed: "Having students do their work in school, under your supervision and using reliable print and online resources, means they will be less likely to go home and 'Google' an entire project" (p. 41). Also, Howard (2002), who believed that policing plagiarism was not a solution and that instructors should teach students the necessary skills instead, concurred, "We beg our students to cheat if we assign a major paper and then have no further involvement with the project until the students turn in their work" (p. 48).

The in-class step-by-step research paper approach that the researcher has used for the past few years has helped to reduce the number of plagiarized papers in her writing courses. Her students have responded positively to the approach. Some students have said that since they work on the research paper almost throughout the entire semester, they have no problems with time management. As a result, they have no stress that is usually caused by lack of time when students leave the work on the research paper for the very end of the semester. In addition, her students have enthusiastically commented on the fact that she stays in class while they work on the first drafts of their papers. Any obstacles that they may face during the process, they can rely on her for guidance.

Conclusions

The aim of present study was to identify causes of plagiarism among Turkish students and suggest possible solutions. Despite the limitations of the study due to the small number of participants (= 06), the study identified five causes of plagiarism: 1) lack of awareness about plagiarism; 2) lack of knowledge about writing research papers; 3) lack of motivation to do research; 4) lack of freedom to express their opinions or use their own voices; and 5) instructors' negative attitude towards writing and low expectations from students. The two most prevalent causes of plagiarism among the Turkish students were students' lack of awareness about plagiarism and students' lack of knowledge about writing research papers. The first three causes found in the present study had been identified by researchers reviewed

in this study; however, the last two causes-- lack of freedom to express their opinions or use their own voices, and instructors' negative attitude towards writing as well as low expectations from students--were not identified by any of the studies reviewed in the current study.

As far as solutions to plagiarism were concerned, the first two solutions proposed to help Turkish students to avoid plagiarism--informing students about the use of available software and search engines that detect plagiarism, and informing students about plagiarism and its consequences--were not considered good solutions. In fact, the best way to combat plagiarism was to quote the title of Howard's (2001a) article, "Forget about policing plagiarism. Just teach." The third solution to combat plagiarism among Turkish students referred to encouraging students to choose intriguing current topics for the research papers. The fourth solution focused on the adaptation of instructors' methodology to help to prevent plagiarism. By providing students with the necessary research tools and skills, instructors would keep students away from plagiarism. The researcher also emphasized that these solutions would be very helpful if instructors had control over students' writing processes. What she recommended was that students write the research paper in class under the instructor's supervision.

This study has shed some light on the causes of plagiarism among Turkish students, and it is hoped that it will motivate researchers to study larger groups of students in Turkey and abroad to verify whether there are yet causes of plagiarism to be identified and solutions to be offered, according to cultural contexts and situations.

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Note

A different version of this paper was presented at the 10th International Conference of the Earli Special Interest Group on Writing at Antwerp University, Belgium, from Sept. 20-22, 2006 and at the 41st Annual IATEFL Conference in Aberdeen, Scotland, from April 18-22, 2007.

Appendix A

About paraphrasing techniques, students should

1. rewrite the original [in their own words] in about the same number of words.
2. provide an in-text citation to author and page number. [They] may and should credit the source at the beginning of the paraphrase and put the page number at the end. In that way, [their] reader will know when the paraphrase begins and when it ends.

3. retain exceptional words and phrases from the original only if [they] enclose them within quotation marks.
4. preserve the tone of the original by suggesting moods of satire, anger, humor, doubt, and so on. Show the author's attitude with appropriate verbs: "Edward Zigler condemns . . . defends . . . argues . . . explains . . . observes . . . defines."

Lester (1993, p. 123)

Below, instructors find an original paragraph on the cause of malaria and the paraphrase as cited in Millward's *Handbook for Writers* (1980), pp. 338-39.

ORIGINAL

The malaria plasmodium, for instance, is probably among the oldest of human (and pre-human) parasites; yet it continues to inflict severe and debilitating fever upon its human hosts. At least four different forms of plasmodium infect human beings, and one of these, *Plasmodium falciparum*, is far more virulent than the others. Conceivably, *Plasmodium falciparum* entered human bloodstreams more recently, and has not had time to adjust as well to human hosts as the other forms of malarial infection. In this case, however, evolutionary adjustment between the host and parasite is complicated by the diversity of hosts to which the infectious organism must accommodate itself to complete its life cycle. Accommodation that would allow the malarial plasmodium to live indefinitely within the red blood corpuscles of a human being would make no provision for successful transmission from host to host.

--William H. McNeill, PLAGUES and PEOPLES

PARAPHRASE

Probably one of the oldest parasites to afflict human beings is the plasmodium, the organism that causes malaria. Despite its long association with human beings, it still produces serious fevers. There are at least four types of plasmodium that affect human beings, but *Plasmodium falciparum* is the most virulent by far. The explanation for its virulence may be that it has come to afflict human beings more recently. If so, it has perhaps had less time to adjust to life in the human bloodstream than have the other types of plasmodium. Further, because the plasmodium adapts itself to a number of different hosts in order **to complete its life cycle**, more time is required for its evolutionary adjustment. However, these different hosts are necessary; if the plasmodium lived indefinitely in one host, such as the human bloodstream, it could not reproduce or “spread” by going **from host to host**.

With the instructor’s guidance, students can analyse the paraphrase above to understand how the writer paraphrased the original paragraph. The instructor can point out what the writer failed to change into his own words or what he failed to use quotation marks around, such as **to complete its life cycle** and **from host to host**, and how these could be considered plagiarism. These give instructors the opportunity to inform students that most writers consider plagiarism two or more words in a sequence copied from a source. In this paraphrase, there are more than two consecutive words in both examples.

Appendix B

Since most international students have difficulties paraphrasing material, the following is an addition to what Lester (1996) suggested about paraphrasing techniques. Students should

1. change all words and phrases that can be changed to synonyms or antonyms (change sentence or phrase to negative or affirmative). Some words and phrases are accepted the way they are, for example, chromosome;
2. change sentence styles. If there are subordinate clauses, they should change to coordinate clauses or to independent clauses, and vice versa;
3. change passive voices to active voices and vice versa whenever possible;
4. change nouns to verbs, and verbs to nouns whenever possible; and
5. change order of ideas whenever possible.

Appendix C

The following is a list of instructions that the researcher gives her students before they start paraphrasing:

1. Read the passage once or twice to understand the meaning of the passage.
2. Read the passage again and underline words you do not understand.
3. Read the passage once more and try to understand what you did not understand before. There may be clues to unknown words in the passage.
4. Check the unknown vocabulary in a thesaurus or dictionary.
5. Change all words that are possible to change. Make sure that whatever was not changed appears within quotation marks with the exception of words that are accepted the way they are, such as the Internet.
6. Change sentence styles.
7. Change order of ideas whenever possible.

The Effect of Rhetorical and Cognitive Structure of Texts on Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This paper examines the comprehension of different text types by readers at different proficiency levels. 170 EFL undergraduates read narrative, expository, and argumentative text types. Significant comprehension differences were found among readers of these text types. Low-level readers performed similarly on the three text types, and thus failed to use the rhetorical structure of the text types and their related processing requirements to improve their performance on these texts. On the other hand, more proficient readers used these features to their advantage in the comprehension process. Their outperforming the low and intermediate groups in expository and argumentative text comprehension shows that certain text types are more difficult for lower-level underachievers, and by implication certain levels of proficiency need to be achieved to have a better performance on these texts. This was further corroborated when we found no significant differences in the performance of the high group on the three text types.

Key Words: Argumentation, exposition, narration, rhetorical structure, text type

Introduction

Text comprehension is an interactive process in which linguistic elements in a discourse or text interact with each other to create the 'texture' of a text (Halliday & Hassan, 1976, de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Also interactions between bottom-up and top-down processing of texts take place in the readers' minds, or between linguistic knowledge and world knowledge (Eskey, 1988, Grabe & Stoller, 2002). The third level of interaction is an interpretive one between the reader and a text, or between the reader and the writer through a text (Nuttall, 1996, Ozono and Ito, 2003). Lipson and Wixon (1986), among others, claim that research on reading ability as well as reading disability should adopt an interactive view.

Such a view takes into account the dynamic process of reading in which the reader, text, process, and the setting conditions of the reading situation interact in an active and flexible manner. This claim should be extended to reading in a foreign language as well. In fact, to understand how foreign language learners comprehend texts, many researchers have emphasized the need to study the differential contribution of text-based characteristics such as genre, text structure parameters, and textual markers (Geva, 1992; Camiciottoli, 2003; Carrel, 1985).

In addition, the readers' ability to comprehend a text may vary as a function of the text type (Schneuwly, 1997; Alverman, et al., 1995). For example, everyday narratives are often believed to deal with familiar and meaningful events. One may therefore assume that it is relatively easy to infer textual relations implied in narratives than in other text forms (expository or argumentative) because of the reader's limited experience and domain-relevant knowledge in comprehending the latter text types. Understanding the rhetorical relations of texts is thought to be at the heart of the comprehension process of the text and of the writers' intention in the text (Alavi, 2001). It follows that if readers can infer textual relations in less demanding texts, they may not be as successful when they have to read and learn from texts that are more demanding, i.e. when they have to learn from expository text, or pinpoint niches from argumentative texts. This difficulty may further illustrate the challenges facing readers of English as a foreign language (EFL) as the focus of literacy programs shifts from "learning to read", a prominent target in the primary grades to "reading to learn" through English at the university (Chall, et al, 1996). Consequently, to understand how EFL readers comprehend texts, studying the differential contribution of different text-based characteristics such as genre, or text type is essential. To this end, this study tries to investigate the way in which foreign readers of English at different proficiency levels approach texts with different rhetorical structures and purposes, i.e. whether readers infer the structure of the texts as successfully in different text types, or whether there is a hierarchy of difficulty as a function of the type of text, or reader proficiency, or as a function of both? To address this main question, EFL readers' comprehension of different text types is investigated. Therefore, the study tried to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any statistically significant difference among low, intermediate, and high level Persian readers of English in their comprehension of narrative, expository and argumentative texts?
2. Do Persian readers of English in each group perform differently on narrative, expository, and argumentative texts?

In the first question, I try to examine the differences among the groups' performances on different text types (intergroup comparison), while in the second question, I try to discover any possible meaningful differences in performance within each group (intragroup comparison).

Theoretical Framework

According to Neubert (1985), "text types motivate particular frames and act out certain scenariosThey recast the linguistic material available in the system of a language into socially efficient, effective and appropriate moulds" (p. 124). He believes that texts are various instances clustering around a holistic experience that has been shared over time. This 'prolonged interactive experience' takes the shape of prototypical encounters and this empirical prototypicality is then translated into the concept of the prototype text. "Its essential nature lies in the fact that it is more than the sum of its features" (p. 127) and text types are prototypes according to just this definition. Other scholars have come up with their own text typologies. More specifically, Werlich (1976) distinguishes between five text types: description, narration, and argumentation, instruction, and procedure text types. They are conceived as an idealized norm for "text structuring which serve as a deep structural matrix of rules and elements for the encoder" (p. 39).

Different text types focus the receiver's attention on different aspects of the communicative situation, and are related to different mental activities. Hatim and Mason (1990) elaborated the cognitive underpinnings of different text types. They argue that expository text type involves analysis and synthesis of concepts, i.e. it deals with the mental process of comprehension. Analysis (taking a concept and working out its constituent elements) or synthesis (taking the constituent elements of a complex concept and working out a shorter formulation for it) are the two basic procedures employed in expository texts.

In argumentative texts the need to persuade through evaluation is paramount with a predominance of emotive diction, metaphoric expression and subtle uses of modality (Hatim and Mason, 1990). In other words, various propositions related to the subject of enquiry are put forward and an argument for or against them is constructed (Lester and Slater, 1998). Tirkonnen–Condit (1996) views the production of argumentative text as the cognitive process of problem solving. She points out that the process of written argumentation typically has the following structural units: situation, problem, solution, and evaluation. Argumentative texts focus on relations between concepts, where one opinion is upheld and its relation with opposing opinions or solution investigated. They deal with the mental

process of judging.

Narratives construct a pattern of events with a problematic and /or unexpected outcome that entertains or instructs the reader or listener. They tend to induce ‘visualization’ in the reader as part of the reading process. They are most often stories written to entertain. The most common elements found in narrative texts are characters with goals and motives, event sequences, morals and themes (Graesser et al, 1991). Narrative texts focus on persons, objects and relations in time, i.e. mental process of perception in time.

There are discussions in the literature as to the distinctions between genre and text type. Genre is defined by Swales (2004) as a frame for social action, with its associated “etiquette” and conventions, with a history of growing development (like that of biological species). These Frames are metaphorically like families which, despite their superficial differences, share some core features. Each of these “frames of social action” is constructed and construct through their roles. One way of making a distinction between ‘genre’ and ‘text type’ is to say that the former is based on external, non- linguistic, traditional criteria while the latter is based on the internal linguistic characteristics of texts themselves (Biber, 1989). Biber believes that genre distinctions do not adequately represent the underlying text types of English, that is linguistically distinct texts within a genre represent different text types, and linguistically similar texts from different genres represent a single text type. Similarly, Trosborg (1997) argues that genre distinctions do not adequately represent the underlying text functions of English. She argues that text types cut across genres, e.g., informative texts (newspaper reports, TV news, textbooks), or argumentative texts (including debates, political speeches, and newspaper articles). Trosborg (1997) refers to two traditions of classifying texts. These classifications derive from Aristotle’s rhetoric, which refers to modes of discourse realized through text types, i.e. narration, description, exposition, argumentation, etc. The first classification is according to purpose that is discourse intended to inform, express an attitude, persuade, and create a debate. The second classification is according to type or mode that is descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative, and instrumental (Kinneavy, 1980).

Although it has been argued that genre and text type represent different approaches to text, they do represent, as Paltridge (2002) argues, complementary perspectives on texts both of which are useful and important for second language classrooms.

Given the above-mentioned text types, Hatim and Mason (1990) point out that no categories, no matter how rigorously worked out, can be expected to be definitive. They believe “what we need to achieve is an approximation to the reality of textual practice” (p.

129). Like Neubert (1985), they point out that one way to achieve this is to view text typologies on two basic levels, a primarily systematic ‘prototype’ and a dynamic ‘parole’ where the actual departure from the norm may be accounted for, but “a focus cumulatively emerges and defines the type of the text” (p. 129).

It is generally assumed that children have greater difficulty with expository than with narrative texts, and with age, less difference and difficulty is associated with the two texts. To test this hypothesis, Berman and Katzenberger (2004) tried to find out how children, young people, and adults conceptualize and construct narrative and expository texts. They analyzed the openings to narrative and expository texts written by 80 Hebrew-speaking children and adults. They found that openings to narrative texts emerge as better as and more structured than those of expository text at an earlier age. This reflects the difficulty of expository text construction in general. They believe that this is both developmentally and experientially ‘anchored’. They also argue that features of socio – cognitive development, and differential exposure to and experience with the two types of texts can explain why children develop command of narratives earlier.

Similarly, Houwse and Kuiken (2004) argue that there is greater degree of personal involvement in narratives. They believe that “Often during narrative encounters, feelings become fluid, comprehension seems multifaceted, and the narrated world is brought vividly to presence” (pp. 169-70).

Finally, Felton and Kuhn (2001) hypothesized that the skills of argumentative discourse develop. They analyzed five dialogues (10-15 minutes each) by adolescents and adults in dyads on the issue of capital punishment, and tried to examine the argument strategies of the two groups. The overall result was that adults behave more strategically. Adults use counterarguments twice as often as teens. Adolescents were more preoccupied with merely producing argumentative discourse. The researchers argue that due to a combination of social and cognitive constraints ‘adolescents show less flexibility in their argumentative discourse than do adults’ (p. 152).

It can therefore be concluded that the skill of argumentation development, like those of the narrative and expository understanding, is mentally and experientially based.

Participants

Participants for this study were 170 male and female Iranian EFL engineering university students. They included undergraduate EFL engineering university students who have their normal general English classes at Iranian universities. They were selected from four

universities in Tehran. At the end of the experiment, 144 participants were qualified to be included in the final analysis; the subjects not included in the final analysis were those who were unable to complete all the experiments according to instructions, as well as those who did not take both test versions.

Table 1. The Distribution of the Participants in the Study

Participant level	N
Low	34
Intermediate	79
High	31
Total	144

Instruments of the study

Two instruments were employed in this study. First, the Michigan Language Proficiency Test (the ECPE version) was used for classifying participants into three proficiency levels in English. The mean (Mean=19.80) and standard deviation (SD=6.70) of the participants' scores on this test was used for this purpose. Consequently, those whose scores were within the range of one standard deviation below the mean constituted the Low group. Those with scores falling between one standard deviation from the mean constituted the Intermediate group, and finally those with plus one standard deviation above the mean constituted the High group.

Secondly, our test booklet included six passages (two expository, two argumentative, and two narrative texts). The passages were selected from college level English textbooks, Encyclopedia Encarta (2002), and Encyclopedia Britannica (2002). Great attention was paid to select expository passages of general knowledge to avoid any bias in terms of topic familiarity. The number of the words in each text ranged from 291 to 322 words.

Initially, the researchers read through a pool of possible passages which seemed to represent different text types. Consequently, several passages of each text type that seemed to be of comparably similar features were selected. Then, for the pilot stage nine passages out of this pool of passages were selected as appropriate passages with comparable features in terms of text type, length, word frequency, number of paragraphs, and readability index.

These passages were also examined and judged appropriate by three experienced instructors involved in teaching English reading courses. Therefore, three passages were selected for each text type for the pilot administration. Each passage included 12 items of sentence matching and multiple choice types tapping both subordinate and superordinate levels of reading proficiency.

The developed instrument was piloted with a group of 20 EFL learners similar to the target population. Subjects took the test over 1.5 hours. Then, the performance of the participants was examined. We discovered that some items needed to be screened out in each text type. Therefore, a decision was made to include items with a discrimination index beyond .40 which is a minimum acceptable level of item discrimination value (Farhady et al., 1995). The number of the passages was also reduced to two passages for each text type. Thus, we decided to include two passages representing each text type, and eight questions for each text type. Moreover, we opted for three text types for two main reasons: first for practicality reasons, i.e. we did not include procedural or descriptive text types because the study would have become too bulky and thus the participants could not manage the whole test in one session. Secondly, these three text types are by far the most frequent text types that learners may encounter in their syllabi. Therefore, the test booklet for the final administration included six passages and 48 items in total. Each passage was followed by eight comprehension questions. The first five questions of each passage were of a matching type. The completion of this section required matching the root sentences with their appropriate endings from the possible options available. These questions were followed by three multiple-choice questions. These questions measured the understanding of the passage's main idea or gist, integration of pre and post connective materials, writer's tone in the passage (arguing, presenting, sympathizing, etc.), inference, grammar, and detail.

The first expository text (ET) was on 'The Question of Sacrifice'. This passage extrapolates the altruistic behavior of some species and how and why it goes the way it does. The second expository text was on 'The Diversity of Life'. The writer discusses the diversity of the organisms and their interaction with the ecosystem.

Narrative texts (NT) were also chosen with great care to avoid the intervening effect of cultural familiarity of the topic. The first narrative text was on 'The Watergate'. The writer narrates the story of the Watergate scandal during Nixon's administration. The second narrative text was on 'The Question of Exercise'. The story is about a man who takes a holiday trip away from home as an excuse to lose some weight.

Argumentative texts (AT) were selected in such a way that the writer was presenting a thesis first and then evaluating it in terms of the pros and cons of the argument, which was finally ended with the writer's attempt to persuade the reader to accept his antithesis as valid and justifiable. The first argumentative text was about 'marine parks', and the writer's argument pivots on why it is not appropriate to have marine parks in cities in Australia. The next argumentative text was on animal testing. The debate here is about why the writer

believes animal testing is still more humane than testing through other means. A description of the features of the texts used in the final administration is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Readability Statistics of the Texts Selected for the Study

Text type	Passages	Text length	Flesch reading ease	Flesh-Kincaid Grade level
AT	Marine parks	322	44.1	11.5
	Animal testing	297	47.9	10.6
ET	The question of sacrifice	331	47.6	10.7
	The diversity of life	290	32.6	12
NT	The Watergate	280	41.9	11
	The question of exercise	291	50.6	10.9

Note: AT (Argumentative Texts), ET (Expository Texts), NT (Narrative Texts)

The reliability of the instrument (the reading package) was estimated and the reliability index was .88. This shows that the instrument in our study was highly reliable. Moreover, the scores on this instrument were correlated with those on Michigan Language Proficiency Test. The validity coefficient was .81 which is a significantly high degree of validity.

Procedures

The participants took the final instruments in two sessions. The first session, the Michigan Language Proficiency Test, was administered to determine the participant's level of language proficiency. In a second session, the participants took the 70-minute reading test. They were notified of the test purpose. Each subject was assigned a test booklet which contained six reading passages (two passages for each text type). An example passage with similar exercises to the instrument was attached to the test booklet to help the subjects better understand how to answer the questions. To reduce the effect of test ordering, the order of administration of the three text types was counterbalanced as follows: narrative-expository-argumentative, Argumentative-narrative-expository, and expository-argumentative-narrative.

The performance of the subjects in each text type was scored for analyses and comparisons. A score of one for each correct response and a score of zero for incorrect responses were considered. The participants' mean scores, and differences in their performances on each text type are compared using descriptive statistics, and multiple analysis of variance. A comparison of the performance of each group across different text types were also examined through Repeated Measures ANOVA.

Results

First, a description of the performances of the participants in different text types is presented in Table 3. To find out whether the mean differences across texts and learner levels are significant, an overall Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance was conducted (see tables 4 and 5). The ANOVA results show significant differences in performance due to the type of the text ($p < .05$, $F=3.89$) as well as the level of language proficiency ($p < .05$, $F=29.14$). However, the interaction between text type and level of language proficiency is not statistically significant, i.e. almost all groups follow similar pattern of performance on different text types. Consequently, to discover the loci of the significant differences across groups and texts, Scheffe analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table 6.

Results in table 6 reveal significant differences in the performance of the three groups on narrative texts. The intermediate group outperformed the beginner group, and the high group outperformed both. This simply shows that with an increase in proficiency, readers' understanding of narrative texts increases too. No significant differences were noticed between the low and intermediate levels on expository texts. However, the high group outperformed the low and intermediate groups significantly. The same patterns of performance were noticed among the three groups on argumentative texts. The performance of the participants on argumentative texts was similar to that on the expository texts, i.e. there was no significant difference between the low and intermediate learner groups on argumentative texts. Moreover, the high group outperformed the low and intermediate groups in a significant manner.

The Within-Subject Effects ANOVA showed comprehension differences due to the three text types. Therefore, Intra-group comparisons were made to discover the differences in the performance of individual groups on different text types. The results of the Repeated Measures ANOVA for intragroup comparisons for the three groups are summarized in Table 7.

Comparisons of the performance of the low group on narrative, expository, and argumentative text types show no significant differences among the three text types. That is, these readers do not distinguish between texts with different rhetorical structures. The results for the intermediate group demonstrate a pattern different from that of the low group. That is, this group performs similarly on both expository and argumentative texts, while their performance on these texts is statistically different from that on the narrative versions, i.e. their scores are much higher on the latter texts. Furthermore, no significant differences between the different versions of the text types were noticed for the high group. This means that the high groups' performance appears not to be affected by the rhetorical structure of the three text types.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of the Three Learner Groups' Comprehension of the Three Text Types

Text type	Level	Mean	Std. Deviation
NT	Low	6.36	1.92
	Intermediate	8.45	3.00
	High	11.25	2.30
ET	Low	6.08	2.23
	Intermediate	7.60	2.64
	High	10	3.51
AT	Low	6.01	1.76
	Intermediate	7.20	2.27
	High	10.81	2.99

Table 4. Within-Subjects Effects ANOVA Results for Text Type and Group

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Text type	32.16	2	16.08	3.89	.02
Text type * Group level	5.69	4	1.42	.34	.84

Table 5. Between-Subjects Effects ANOVA Results for Group Level

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	15005.65	1	15005.65	1147.82	.00
Group level	761.92	2	380.96	29.14	.00

Table 6. Scheffe Analysis for Multiple Comparisons for Groups across Different Texts

Dependent Variable	Level	Level	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
NT	low	intermediate	-2.09*	.79	.04
		high	-4.89*	.95	.00
	intermediate	high	-2.8*	.69	.00
ET	low	intermediate	-1.52	.78	.10
		high	-3.92*	.93	.00
	intermediate	high	-2.40*	.68	.00
AT	low	intermediate	-1.19	.66	.21
		high	-4.8*	.79	.00
	intermediate	high	-3.61*	.58	.00

Table 7. Repeated Measures ANOVA for Intragroup Comparisons

Group	Text	Text	Mean difference	Sig.
Low	NT	ET	.32	.52

		AT	.35	.61
		ET	-.07	.81
Inter		ET	.85*	.01
		AT	1.25*	.00
		ET	-.40	.23
high		ET	1.25	.13
		AT	.44	.09
		ET	.81	.71

Discussion

Results of the first question of the study demonstrated significant differences among the three learner levels in narrative texts. This shows that narrative comprehension among our subject groups is a function of reading proficiency level. Contrary to the differences noticed between the intermediate and low group in the narrative version, we do not see any significant differences between the two groups in the expository and argumentative texts. The high group's performance is significantly higher than that of the two groups in these kinds of texts too. Expository texts were found to be more difficult to comprehend than narrative texts for the readers because of the processing demands of these texts, as well as the participants' limited domain-relevant knowledge (Geva, 2004; Bialystock and Rayan, 1986). Both groups are challenged by the need to note and process the micro and macro-structures of such texts. This finding is also supported by Chung (2000) who found that the low group's performance was as good as the intermediate group among Chinese readers of English in expository texts. These two types of texts appear to be demanding for low level readers. In such texts, the reader has to draw more on text-based inferences and comprehend the general concepts through differentiation by analysis and synthesis (in expository texts), and evaluate the relations between and among concepts (in argumentative texts). This provides support for the cognitive properties of text types in readers' minds (Hatim and Mason, 1990; Werlich, 1976; Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981). Each text type offers a cognitive framework within which readers can draw their inferences. Given this, it appears that certain plateaus of proficiency need to be reached before improvements in the comprehension of different text types become apparent. Each of the cognitive textual frames represented through text types demands different amounts of cognitive load, so that narratives are easier than expository and argumentative texts. It is argued that **an** expository text creates its own context, while narrative organization may be manifested even in personal experience accounts that might be particularly interesting in content or less complicated in structure. Therefore, further research should investigate text types either as a variable or as a limitation if it is not controlled for.

Unfortunately, there is scarcely any research on the L2 readers of English in their understanding of argumentative texts. Nonetheless, educators argue that argumentative writing is the most challenging type of writing “because students do not understand argument” (Gleason, 1999, p. 81). Argumentative texts appear to be challenging for beginners as well as intermediate students. Understanding the writer’s tone in argumentative texts requires not only linguistic knowledge but also a critical evaluative understanding of the texts as well. Comprehending argumentative texts may not also be easy in comparison to other texts since the students may have had limited exposure to and experience with such texts. This implication is important for textbook writers and curriculum developers to analyze and determine the types of writing to be included in each reading/writing program, to determine the proportion of discourse types in each grade level. A preponderance of selections in basal reading programs is reported to be narrative, by contrast, expository passages account for a very low allocation index, and no reports on the inclusion of argumentative passages in such programs are made (Flood and Lapp, 1986). This stresses the need to include a variety of discourse forms to ensure exposure to and instruction in various writing types before students are required to read complex content–area textbooks.

In this research, the high group outperformed the other groups in all the three text types. This finding is in support of the research which shows that better readers recall more textual relations than the low-group readers (Zinar, 1990; Loman and Meyer, 1983). This might be due to their rhetorical awareness of the texts and text purposes, as well as their linguistic knowledge, both of which provide readers with more ‘cognitive control’ in their comprehension process.

Readers’ average performance on the three text types in the low group was not statistically significant because they find narrative, expository and argumentative text types challenging and because they failed to distinguish the processing requirements of each of these text types. For example, they might have failed to make predictions and forward inferences in narratives, or associations and backward inferences in argumentative and expository texts (Horiba, 2000). This argument is further supported when we examine the performances of the intermediate and high group on the three text types.

It seems that the intermediate group is somewhat aware of the text-type-specific modes of processing. Thus, this groups’ performance on different text types turns out to be different. Of course, they did not perform significantly differently on expository and argumentative texts. Consequently, one can speculate that the two types of texts exact similar processing abilities on the readers in the intermediate group. This claim, of course, needs to be supported through other means of comprehension elicitation such as recall protocols. Thus, other research can use recall protocol to check for the readers’ comprehension.

The high group's average performance on the three text types, similar to that of the low group, was not statistically significant. It appears that the high group probably employs the textual resources in each text type to identify the structure of the text, and thus tackle the comprehension problems in a more strategic manner. One important means of building a coherent mental representation for encoding and retrieving information from a text is to utilize the text structure (Grimes, 1975; Mann and Thompson, 1986; Meyer, 1975). Because of the limited processing capacity of underachieving readers, they need a means of focusing on the top or superordinate structure of the text so that they can retain the main points of the texts. To this end, low-level readers probably use a 'list' strategy whereby they treat all the information equally, while good readers tend to use a structure strategy focusing on the top-level structure of the text. The low group is either unaware of these textual structures or has failed to utilize them to decode such structures. In Meyer et al's study (1980), poor comprehenders exhibited using the list strategy regardless of the textual resources available in the texts like logical connectors, headings, discourse signals, etc. The intermediate group seems to have recognized the importance of text structure to some extent, i.e. they have been able to switch their strategy from a listing to structure strategy because their mean performance on narrative texts is significantly much higher than that on expository or argumentative texts.

The results of this study suggest that advanced readers are probably more aware of rhetorical and cognitive structures of texts and thus utilize them more strategically, while low underachievers are more dependent, but less aware of them. This result can further shed light on the way L2 readers approach and comprehend different text types. Undergraduate EFL readers of English refer to a developmental trend whereby narrative texts are better understood than expository and argumentative texts. Research on L1 readers of narrative and expository texts in English has shown that L1 readers have greater difficulty with expository than with narrative texts, and, with age, less difference and difficulty is associated with the two text types (Berman & Katzenberger, 2004). Features of socio-cognitive development, and differential exposure to and experience with the two types of texts can explain why early grade readers develop command of narratives earlier.

Awareness of the rhetorical text structure is helpful in improving the overall comprehension of the texts both in L1 and in L2 reading (Sharp, 2002). Future research should also consider extending the range of rhetorical patterns beyond the three text types examined here, and include other important variables and methods such as gender and text recall. Comparisons among different language groups and the possible effects of differing rhetorical organizations, and how they might relate to the students' L1 offers considerable possibilities for future research as well.

Finally, raising underachievers' awareness of text structures and writer strategies in producing such textual patterns can enhance their achievement in reading and writing.

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Appendix

Name:

class hour:

University:

Read each passage and then answer each of the questions which follow in your answer sheet. The reading passage below has been done for you as an example.

EXAMPLE READING

Tired Land

When nature is left alone, a balance is reached among the animals and plants. But when man interferes with nature the balance is upset. He grows a crop and takes it away to eat; then there are no dead leaves to fall on the ground holding water while it sinks into the surface, or decaying and adding organic material to the soil. Unless a farmer acts with knowledge and skill, he tends therefore to make the land poorer. To replace the organic matters, fertilizers are helpful but the waste products of animals and the decaying remains of plants should also be put on the land. In some places it is a habit to burn waste material lying about, but such burning destroys the organic matter in the dead plants. Although the ashes that are left are valuable when put on the land, a better practice is to bury the waste, so that it decays and increases the organic matters in the soil.

Formerly, when a field had been cultivated for some time, the farmer could move to another place to grow his crops. Then the tired land slowly recovered. If the farmer wants his land to be restored more quickly than nature alone will do it for him, he must plant grass, and not leave it to appear when it is ready.

It is a bad practice to grow the same crop in a field year after year. If the crop is changed, the land will suffer less since it is treated and used in different ways. Some plants have roots that go down deeply into the soil but roots of others keep nearer the surface. Consequently, a change of crop will do less harm than the growing of the same crop year after year. Thus, a periodic change to grass will benefit the soil. Moreover, it has been found that if one crop is grown regularly in the same place it easily suffers from disease. Therefore, much will be gained if different crops are grown one after the other.

QUESTIONS on "Tired Land"

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. An ignorant farmer will make the land poorer ...**F**.....
2. Restoring the land involves care ...**H**.....
3. If a crop is changed by the farmer yearly ...**C**.....
4. A wise farmer replaces the organic matter in the crops that he removes**D**....
5. Tired land has fully recovered**E**....

Possible Endings

unless a farmer acts with knowledge and skill
because he leaves dead leaves to decay in the soil
less harm will be done to the soil
with animals' waste products and decaying remains of plants
as well as chemical fertilizers
after grass and other plants have decayed again

since he clears away all the dead leaves
with animals' waste products and decaying remains of plants
instead of chemical fertilizers
otherwise, the land will get more tired

6. Of the following plants the one which protects the surface of the soil most is
- maize
 - sugar-cane
 - melon
 - wheat

Marine Parks

It is claimed that marine parks allow the average Australian to understand our marine wildlife. However, dolphins, whales and seals can be viewed in the wild at a number of places on the Australian coast. In fact, there are more places where they can be seen in the wild than places where they can be seen in captivity. Moreover, most Australians would have to travel less to get to these locations than they would to get to the marine parks on the Gold Coast. The argument goes that marine parks experimental knowledge is useful for the conservation planning of marine species. However, park research is only useful for understanding captive animals and is not useful for learning about animals in the wild. First of all, Dolphin and whale biology changes in marine park conditions. Their diets are different, they have significantly lower life periods and they are more likely to be affected by disease. In addition, marine mammals in dolphin parks are trained. Consequently, this means that their patterns of social behaviour are changed. Therefore research done at marine parks is generally not helpful.

Marine parks owners claim to develop the economy through attracting foreign tourists. However, they would still come to Australia if the parks were closed down, i.e. they can see animals in those conditions in their own countries. Furthermore, we should be promoting our beautiful natural environment to tourists and not the ugly concrete marine park venues.

The concrete walls of the pools interfere with the animals' systems of communication. In addition, keeping them in pools is a terrible restriction of the freedom of fellow creatures who may have very high levels of intelligence and a great language ability.

In conclusion, these parks should be closed, or at the very least, no new animals should be captured for marine parks in the future. No longer is our society prepared to tolerate unnecessary cruelty to animals for science and entertainment.

QUESTIONS on "Marine Parks"

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. Visitors will get to Australia.....
2. It is stated that the cruelty to animals
3. It is stated in the passage that.....
4. Our knowledge of marine park animals changes.....
5. The writer of the passage presents

Possible Endings

traveling to the wild is less time-consuming than traveling to the marine parks
for marine conservation studies change

because there is access to them in their native country
even if the marine parks are removed
could not be tolerated any more
because the conditions in marine parks change
six reasons to show marine park research is not very helpful
four reasons to show marine park research is not very helpful

6. The main idea of this passage is that
- a. wildlife should be protected from public
 - b. research is only useful for understanding captive animals
 - c. marine parks provide the only opportunity to see mammals
 - d. the freedom of the marine mammals is under threat
7. We can understand that the writer
- a. feels disappointed about marine parks owners
 - b. is concerned about human cruelty to environment
 - c. regards marine parks as inadequate places
 - d. regrets the mammals' conditions in the parks and in the wild
8. Marine parks are believed by the writer to
- a. possess no natural beauty
 - b. have pools with no walls
 - c. have similar conditions in Australia
 - d. develop the tourism industry

Animal Testing

Every day, thousands of people are saved from painful diseases and death by powerful medical drugs and treatments. This gift of medicine would not be possible without animal testing. Despite these considerable benefits, however, some people are calling for animal testing to be banned because of possible cruelty. Those against the use of animal testing claim that it is inhumane to use animals in experiments. However, it would be much more inhumane to test new drugs on children or adults. Even if it were possible, it would also take much longer to see potential effects, because the length of time we live compared to laboratory animals such as rats or rabbits is greater.

Moreover, those against animal testing claim that the results are not applicable to humans. This may be partly true. Some drugs have had to be withdrawn, despite the fact that they have been examined. However, we simply do not have other methods of testing. Computer models are not advanced enough, and testing on plants is much less applicable to humans than tests on animals such as monkeys. Until we have a better system, we must use animal testing.

A further point often raised against animal testing is that it is cruel. Some of the tests certainly seem painful, but the majority of people on this planet eat meat or wear leather without any guilt. Where is their sympathy for animals? Furthermore, animals clearly do not feel the same way as humans, and scientists are careful to minimize stress in the animals, since this would damage their research.

I agree that we need to make sure that animals used for testing new products have the minimum of suffering. However, I am convinced that animal testing is necessary, and that it will continue to benefit humans in new and wonderful ways.

QUESTIONS on “Animal Testing”

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. Scientists take care to reduce stress in the animals
2. Some pills need to be banned
3. Animal testing needs to be practiced
4. Animal’s feelings are different from humans
5. It is stated that testing on plants

Possible Endings

or it may lead to unreliable results
at the same time that we test through other ways
so that they may have sympathy for animals
although they have been tested
before we have other means for testing
moreover, experimenters try not to affect their feelings
is applicable enough to humans
is of little application to humans

6. It is mainly argued that animal testing
 - a. is favorable and applicable
 - b. is not applicable much to humans
 - c. has no sympathy for animals
 - d. is inhumane to animals
7. The writer of the passage
 - a. feels little sympathy towards animals
 - b. is angry with the current animal testing
 - c. regards the practice quite humane
 - d. sees not much fault with the testing
8. Medical science would make little progress
 - a. with animal testing
 - b. without animal testing
 - c. with research on laboratory animals
 - d. without sympathy for animals

The Question of Sacrifice

One fascinating point about some animal societies is the sacrificing way one animal seems to offer its services to others—altruism. For instance, in the beehive, workers work hard non-stop in the hive for three weeks after they come out and then they search outside for food until they wear out two or three weeks later. Yet, the workers leave no offspring. How could natural selection favor such self-sacrifice? This question presents itself in almost every social species.

The apparent altruism favors are given because they will almost certainly be repaid. One chimpanzee will clean another. However, such a system requires that animals be able to

recognize one another as individuals, so that they are able to reject those who would accept favors without paying them back.

A second kind of altruism is exemplified by the behavior of male sage grouse, which gather together into groups-leks. Females come to these groups to mate, but only some of males in the central spots actually mate the next generation. Other males advertise themselves strongly but they succeed only in attracting additional females to the favored few in the centre. Natural selection has not gone wrong here, however; males move further inward every year, until they reach the centre of the lek.

The altruism of honey bees has an entirely genetic explanation, i.e. males have only one set of chromosomes. Animals normally have two sets, passing on only one when they mate; hence, they share half their genes with any offspring and the offspring have half their genes in common with one another. This system, known as kin selection, is widespread. All it requires is that an animal perform services of little cost to itself but of great benefit to relations. Bees are the ultimate example of altruism because their system provides this extra genetic benefit, but kin selection works almost as well in a variety of genetically conventional animals. Even human societies may not be unaffected by the programming of kin selection.

QUESTIONS on “The Question of Sacrifice”

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

- a. Chimpanzees cannot realize each other as individuals
- b. Altruism is evident in bees
- c. Worker bees get tired.....
- d. The writer of the passage presents
- e. The sage grouse at the center of the group are

Possible Endings

- A after three weeks hard work in the hive
- B due to their genetic properties
- C despite doing favors to each other
- D three examples of altruism amongst animals
- E because of the behavior of their offspring
- F four kinds of altruism amongst animals
- G few in number and thus favored
- H after two or three weeks looking for food

- 6. It can be concluded that
 - a. kin selection is determining all the altruism amongst animals
 - b. self – sacrifice may take place in every social group
 - c. natural selection is the result of exchanging roles
 - d. animals offer services to themselves through selection

- 7. It can be inferred from paragraph four that
 - a. chromosome systems of animals and insects are different
 - b. chromosome systems of animals and insects are the same
 - c. the animals share all their genes with their offspring
 - d. kin selection affects all the chromosomes

8. Kin selection is considered to be
 - a. particular to some bees
 - b. common just among bees and sage grouse
 - c. quite common among animals
 - d. genetic only among animals

The Diversity of Life

Although the environment changes greatly from one place to another, almost every part of the surface of the earth is occupied by living organisms. This is possible because each species is adapted for life in a particular place and because the diversity of organisms is so great that some kind of life can exist nearly everywhere. However, the same adaptations which enable a species to survive in one environment also make it impossible for this species to live in other environments.

One part of the environment of the individual organism is its community of interacting organisms. Therefore, the individual must be adapted for life in its own community, but at the same time it must be adapted so that it can survive in the particular physical conditions which form the other part of its environment.

The physical factors which control the distribution of land plants include light intensity, the type of soil, and the availability of water. But the most important is the climate. For example, on the basis of temperature we can divide the world into five regions. Then, within each region we can recognize various areas where the physical conditions are very different. For example, polar regions include physically distinct areas which support such different groups of plants as those of dry and wet grassland, e.g., dwarf woody-plant areas in dry lands.

Moreover, the distribution of animals is controlled by physical factors, but since heterotrophs all depend upon autotrophs for their food, the plants in an area must obviously affect the animal life there. Thus, plant-eating animals only eat particular plants and can therefore only live in areas where these particular plants grow. Conversely, of course, the animals in a community affect the plants mainly because the animals eat them.

QUESTIONS on "The Diversity of Life"

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. The writer of the passage discusses
2. Although animals can adapt to environments
3. Plants influence animal life
4. We can find out areas with different physical conditions
5. The diversity of organisms is great

Possible Endings

- A** the adaptation and diversity of the living organisms
- B** thus they can live everywhere
- C** since plant-eating animals eat only particular plants
- D** this places a restriction on living in other places
- E** because they depend on animals for growth
- F** adaptations help animals to survive
- G** when we divide regions based on temperature
- H** the diversity and existence of the organisms

6. Which of these physical factors can explain why a dwarf woody – plant cannot grow into a normal tree?

- a. very strong winds all the year round
- b. the presence of much dissolved salt in the water
- c. a shortage of water that prevents growth for most of the year
- d. the other land plants which grow nearby

7. Paragraph two mainly discusses

- a. interactions and adaptations
- b. environmental spread of organisms
- c. adaptation to the environment
- d. the distribution of animals

8. What is the most important feature of a community?

- a. all the members depend directly or indirectly upon the sun's energy.
- b. it is relatively independent of other communities of organisms.
- c. complex interrelationships link all the members together.
- d. the feeding relationships are very complicated.

The Watergate

Even after the news of the Watergate case was almost a year old, yet the American people had not become accustomed to hearing new stories of corruption and dishonesty in the Nixon government. Each new event was just as surprising as the previous ones. Consequently, the president was becoming increasingly unsuccessful in gaining confidence in his administration.

Nixon had ordered Richardson, the chief judge, to fire the special investigator, Cox. However, Richardson was opposed to getting rid of him; as a result, Richardson resigned from his position as chief judge. Then, the president ordered former Deputy judge Ruckelhaus to fire Cox. But like Richardson, Ruckelhaus could not see the need for releasing Cox from his duties. Millions of Americans were surprised and shocked. Therefore, they accused Nixon of acting irresponsibly.

The country soon learned that Cox had been fired because he had made intense efforts to gain the White House tapes. Previously, Nixon had said that he was not afraid of releasing the tapes because of possible evidence that might prove he was guilty. On the contrary, he stated he was only concerned about preserving the secrecy of presidential material.

In spite of his past refusals to give out the tapes, Nixon finally announced that he would do so. Then, Cox had been released. The people had become tired of listening to the daily reports of crime and dishonesty in Nixon's government. Even past supporters felt that Nixon could no longer be responsible for keeping law and order in the country since his government had become infamous for breaking and ignoring the law. They believed that in the interest of preserving the dignity of the presidency, Nixon should resign.

QUESTIONS on "The Watergate"

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. The people were not accustomed to hearing new corruption cases
2. People who were in favor of Nixon
3. Nixon's announcement took place
4. Each new event in Nixon's administration was.....
5. People lost confidence in Nixon's administration

Possible Endings

- A** because of crimes against government
- B** in other words people lost Nixon's government
- C** after Cox was released
- D** unacceptable like the ones before
- E** required him give up presidency contrary to their expectations
- F** that is the new events were shocking
- G** supported him although his government was irresponsible
- H** due to repeated crimes and dishonesty

6. The main idea of the passage is that
- a. the story of Watergate caused Nixon's failure
 - b. dishonesty and crime led to Nixon's failure
 - c. Nixon was responsible for keeping law and order
 - d. people had lost faith in Nixon's government
7. The writer of the passage
- a. argues for an event
 - b. tells about the fall of a government
 - c. analyzes Nixon's release of Cox
 - d. presents the Watergate case
8. Nixon and Richardson argued about
- a. the Watergate scandal
 - b. the need to free Cox
 - c. dismissing Cox
 - d. Nixon's lack of responsibility

A Question of Exercise

I have always taken an unwise pride in my good health, for apart from the occasional cold, I have never had to take a day off work. So, I was quite offended when my doctor took one look at me and told me that I was definitely overweight and that it might not be very long before I had a heart attack, if I did not lose some weight.

Although it was true that I had been getting fatter, this had not worried me much, owing to the fact that I was getting older.

Following my doctor's advice, I tried cutting down on fattening foods. Unfortunately, besides being very fond of my food, I have a wife who is an excellent cook, so there were no considerable signs of success. Then, having decided that it was all a question of exercise, I was determined that this year's holiday should be spent somewhere which was conducive to taking exercise and not at our usual seaside resort. Furthermore, I decided not to take our car with us, knowing that if we did we would only be tempted to behave as thousands of other holiday-makers do.

We decided on a remote place in the Scottish Highlands. We stayed at a hotel which I had seen advertised in my Sunday newspaper as being agreeably situated in the midst of excellent walking country. Although I felt horribly stiff, I continued. As the days passed, our walks became longer and longer and I began to feel increasingly fit. However, taking so much exercise naturally gave me a healthy appetite. When I got back home again, I weighed myself on the weighing machine only to find that rather than having lost any weight, I had put some on.

QUESTIONS on "A Question of Exercise"

Match each of the following sentences with ONE possible ending from the list below.

1. The doctor asked the man to include
2. The writer of the passage was
3. The man believed in exercise as
4. The writer walked more along the seaside resort
5. There were no noticeable signs of success.....

Possible Endings

- A** his back got horribly stiff
- B** less fattening food in his diet but he did not
- C** a middle-aged man and very concerned about exercise
- D** because of loving food and excellent cooking
- E** some days after his stay there
- F** some exercise in his schedule despite his being fond of food
- G** not concerned about his fatness first due to his getting older
- H** all that he needed

6. The main idea of the passage is that
 - a. one should take his doctor's advice seriously
 - b. diet and exercise should be controlled to keep fit
 - c. exercise causes one to lose weight agreeably
 - d. losing weight requires a lot of walk near the seaside

7. The man chose a remote place to
 - a. have enough exercise and walking
 - b. be away from home this year
 - c. have a pleasant time this year
 - d. enjoy the hotel in there

8. The man finally decided on
 - a. not taking the car because of the behavior of holiday makers
 - b. taking the car like a few holiday makers
 - c. not taking the car like thousands of holiday makers
 - d. not taking the car like few of holiday makers



Promoting Self-assessment Strategies: An Electronic Portfolio Approach

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Abstract

Creating electronic portfolios is proposed as an effective means to facilitate language learning and writing in particular because it enables learners to monitor their own writing process and to put into practice a multitude of writing strategies. Among the strategies practiced, self-assessment, a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning, is the less explored one. As such, this study set out to investigate how self-assessment was utilized by two English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners when they were writing in their electronic portfolios. The data were collected by virtue of the following instruments: a) semi-structured interviews, b) an open-ended questionnaire, c) a self-assessment checklist, d) learners' journals and e) essays. The collected data were coded into three categories—the learners' general English learning background, the learners' writing strategies, and the learners' self-assessment practices. The findings suggested that both EFL learners employed an array of writing strategies—cognitive strategy, memory strategy and metacognitive self-assessment strategy—to approach specific writing tasks. The results also revealed that compiling electronic portfolios promoted learners' self-assessment practice and thus encouraged self-directed language learning. However, the concern about the extent to which learners could be involved in grading process was raised due to unfamiliarity and traditional EFL teacher-student power relationship.

Key words: Self-assessment, Electronic Portfolio, Alternative Assessment, Language Learning Strategies

1. Introduction

It has been argued that self-assessment serves as an effective language learning strategy to promote autonomous language learning because it encourages language learners to assess their learning progress and in turn helps them to stay focused on their own learning (Chamot

& O'Malley, 1994; Chen, 2005; O'Malley & Pierce, 1996; Oscarson, 1997). The proponents of self-assessment strategies maintain that participating in self-assessment can help learners become skilled judges of their own strengths and weaknesses and establish realistic and attainable goals for themselves, thus developing their self-directed language learning ability (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Dickinson, 1987; Oscarson, 1997). A widely used instrument for self-assessment is the portfolio. Portfolios provide an opportunity for English as a Foreign / Second language (EFL/ESL) learners to monitor their own writing progress and take responsibility for meeting goals. By documenting growth over time through a systematic collection of their work, portfolios enable learners to see possibilities for reflection, redirection, and confirmation of their own learning efforts (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Simply put, when a student reviews a written piece and decides to revise and improve it, the student engages in self-assessment.

In the literature, a number of studies have been done to examine the relationship between self-assessment ratings and objective exams, teacher ratings or level of proficiency (Bachman & Palmer, 1989; Bailey, 1998; Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Heilenman, 1990; LeBlanc & Painchaud, 1985; Oskarsson, 1984), but only a few attempts have been made to explore how and if students use self-assessment strategies when they write. In addition, among the studies done on self-assessment strategies, most were carried out with ESL or Foreign Language (FL) students, with few efforts invested to target EFL learners. Given that the EFL context is a special research area because the concept of self-assessment may be quite unfamiliar and challenging to many EFL learners (Harris, 1997), the current study intends to probe the questions as to if and how EFL learners use self-assessment strategies when writing in their electronic portfolios.

The research questions that guided the investigation in this study go as follows.

1. What writing strategies are used by EFL learners when writing in the electronic portfolios?
2. Does creating electronic writing portfolios promote EFL learners' use of self-assessment strategies? If it does, in what ways?
3. What are EFL students' concerns about practicing self-assessment strategies?

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is self-assessment?

According to Oscarson (1997), self-assessment refers to how, under what conditions, and

with what effects learners and other users of a foreign or second language may judge their own ability in the language. It employs a variety of techniques to probe language learners' proficiency, such as self-reports, self-testing, mutual peer-assessment, keeping learning journals, answering questionnaires, using global proficiency rating scales, and responding to so-called "can-do" statements that ask learners to respond if they are able to perform specific language functions. These techniques require learners' awareness of their own progress, in terms not only of language but also of communicative objectives. As Chamot and O'Malley (1994) point out, "self-assessment requires the student to exercise a variety of learning strategies and higher order thinking skills that not only provide feedback to the student but also provide direction for future learning" (p. 119).

2.2. Portfolios as a medium for self-assessment

A widely used instrument for practicing self-assessment strategies is the portfolio. Portfolios provide an opportunity for learners to monitor their own progress and take responsibility for meeting goals. Gottlieb (2000) points out that through the portfolio approach "second language learners are acknowledged as contributors and the multicultural resources that the students bring to assessment situations serve as rich data sources" (p. 96). She further delineates that portfolios designed by second language learners can help capture the full range of the students' competencies in one or more languages. Developmental portfolios also enable learners to demonstrate their growth in language proficiency, including oral language and literacy development, academic achievement, attitudinal variation in terms of acculturation and learning and acquisition of learning strategies (Gottlieb, 2000). Hence, at the heart of portfolio pedagogy is a place for self-assessment guided by learners (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000).

While portfolio assessment is practiced as an integral part of instruction, Paulson and Paulson (1992) argue that it also serves as a practical medium for self-assessment and propose three steps for practicing self-assessment with portfolios: documentation, comparison and integration. The first step, documentation, asks learners to provide a justification for the selected items for the portfolios. In comparison, learners compare a recent piece of work with an earlier one and identify ways that they have improved. In the final step, integration, learners use portfolios to provide examples of their growing strengths in oral or written language. These three steps not only facilitate reflection on learning but also prepare students to become independent learners.

When learners are engaged in portfolio development, a number of advantages have been

proposed, including fostering intrinsic motivation, responsibility and ownership, showing what students can do rather than what they can not do, giving a richer picture of the students' ability and understanding, facilitating critical thinking, self-assessment and revision processes and providing tangible evidence of a student's work (Brown, 2004; Brown & Hudson, 1998; Chen, 2006; Delett, Barnhardt & Kevorkian, 2001; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Gottlieb, 1995; 2000; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Hirvela & Pierson, 2000; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996; Weigle, 2002).

2.3. Electronic portfolios as an alternative

With the advent of technology, electronic portfolios are introduced. According to Barrett (2000), an electronic portfolio includes the use of electronic technologies that allow the portfolio developers to collect and organize artifacts in many formats. Heath (2002) proposes that once the portfolio is created electronically, it is easier to maintain, edit and update than its paper counterpart. With electronic portfolios, students' work can be collected, stored and managed electronically, taking very little or no physical space. Furthermore, since Internet-based electronic portfolios are not constrained by time, they also enhance peer and teacher feedback, two major components of portfolio assessment. Therefore, electronic portfolios offer all of the advantages of regular portfolios such as the opportunity to self-assess the writing process, as well as other advantages regular portfolios lack (Pullman, 2002). For example, electronic portfolios move peer reviews and papers from manila folders to an on-line environment, which helps students become more aware of their peers as the audience and create their own public community of writers (Wall & Peltier, 1996). Thus, such a view of electronic portfolios ushers in the possibility of a new literacy and new ways of conceiving writing and writing pedagogy (Pullman, 2002). In short, as their paper counterparts, electronic portfolios play an important role not only in activating the students' metacognitive strategies but also in promoting their autonomy.

2.4. Concerns about practicing self-assessment in the EFL contexts

A number of concerns have been raised about practicing self-assessment in the EFL contexts. First, the concept of self-assessment may be quite unfamiliar and threatening to many EFL learners because it changes traditional teacher-learner relationships (Blue, 1994; Heron, 1988). Therefore, training and support become crucial in this practice. Second, learners' ability to self-assess accurately is controversial. Some research studies suggest that learners tend to say what they cannot do or what they find difficult to do rather than what they can do

(Bachman & Palmer, 1989). Third, learners are likely to be able to assess their abilities more accurately when they are provided with specific self-assessment statements that are closely related to their personal experience (Ross, 1998). These concerns have made the practice of self-assessment in the EFL classrooms challenging.

To sum up, self-assessment through portfolios is advocated and embraced by researchers. However, studies carried out on its counterpart, self-assessment in electronic portfolios, are few and far between. Moreover, little systematic attempt has been made to deal with EFL contexts, investigating if and how EFL learners use self-assessment strategies. Therefore, this study set out to take a closer look at EFL learners' use of writing strategies, self-assessment strategies in particular, when they are writing in their electronic portfolios.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

The method used for this study was qualitative case study. According to Merriam (1998), a case study is a particularly suitable design if the researcher is interested in process. Therefore, the present study, aiming to explore, understand, and analyze EFL learners' use of strategies, employed a case study to provide in-depth portraits of two EFL learners' use of strategies while they were writing in their electronic portfolios.

3.2. Participants

In order to obtain in-depth information, this study focused on two participants selected by purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). According to Merriam (1998), purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researchers want to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore, they must select participants from whom the most can be learned. Hence, data for the current study were collected through the researcher's connection with a college-level EFL teacher in Taiwan, who required students to design electronic portfolios as an assignment for the class. The teacher was then asked to recommend some EFL students who showed interests in participating in the study. Then, the researcher began to contact the potential participants by e-mail. The two participants were finalized based on their willingness to participate in the study and completeness of their electronic portfolios. Both of them were college EFL learners who were enrolled in an English class at a university in an EFL context—Taiwan. Table 1 below presents each student's background information.

Table 1: Students' background information

Students (pseudo-name)	Kai-Yu*	A-Ling*
Age	21	21
Gender	Female	Female
Education level	College sophomore	College sophomore
Major	English	English
Test performance	Below average	Above average
Native language	Chinese	Chinese
Target language	English	English
The length of studying the target language	9 years	8 years
Highest level of proficiency acquired	High-beginning	High-beginning
Where they learn the language	Classroom	Classroom

* To keep confidentiality, students' real names were not revealed. Instead, pseudo-names were used.

3.3. Implementation

The portfolio project was implemented in an EFL classroom for a semester of 18 weeks. At the beginning of the semester, students learned how to create their own electronic portfolios at a free electronic portfolio website: <http://spaces.msn.com>, a ready-made webpage that calls for only minimal computer skills. During the semester, the students worked on and uploaded two required 300-word essays with drafts, gave peer feedback and revised essays according to teachers' and peers' comments. In addition, they were encouraged to upload self-chosen entries, such as diary entries and anecdotes. At the end of the semester, students' portfolios were evaluated and took twenty percent of students' final grade.

3.4. Data Collection

The data for the current study were collected through the following instruments:

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow the researcher to respond to the situations at hand, and to the emerging perspectives of the participants. Three semi-structured interviews were administered with each taking approximately 40 minutes. The

first interview, a warm-up, asked for the participants' background information and explained the purpose of the study. The second and third interviews were more formal and specifically targeted the participants' use of writing and self-assessment strategies. All of the interviews were done in the participants' native language, Chinese. The interviews were followed by three e-mail interviews, conducted in Chinese, in order to clarify some points that need further explanation (See Appendix I for sample interview questions).

Open-ended questionnaire. An open-ended questionnaire was administered (See Appendix II for the questionnaire) in which participants could choose to answer the questions in Chinese or English. Based on three major research questions, the researcher crafted the questionnaire and then forwarded it to a qualified colleague for peer debriefing. Then, the researcher revised the questionnaire in accordance with the comments the colleague provided. Having no time limitation, the questionnaire allowed participants enough time to formulate their answers and respond to the questions at their disposal.

Self-assessment checklist. Designed by the researcher and commented by the same colleague, a self-assessment checklist was distributed (See Appendix III for the checklist). The checklist simply asked learners to rate their essay on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing poor and 5 representing excellent. In addition, the checklist also required learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Journals. The learners' journals on their English learning experience were collected. In the journals, learners discussed how they learned English and reflected on their English writing process.

Essays with drafts. Two 300-word essays were collected from each participant. As one of the class assignments, the essay asked learners to reflect on the topics of leisure time and the impact of TV on our lives. Two drafts of each essay were also collected for analysis.

3.5. Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and coded into three categories—the learners' general English learning background, the learners' writing strategies, and the learners' self-assessment practices.

4. Findings

4.1. Case one: Kai-Yu

4.1.1. Kai-Yu's general English learning background

Kai-Yu started to learn English when she was a sixth grader in elementary school. Like many

other students, Kai-Yu went to cram schools to improve her English when she was in junior high school (7th to 9th grades) (1st interview, 03/20/2005). However, unlike her peers, she enjoyed the classes at cram school even though the classes finished at almost eleven o'clock at night. She believed the intensive language classes would help her improve English a lot. Nevertheless, she reported that she lost her motivation to learn English when she entered senior high school (10th to 12th grades) due to the lack of frequent exposure to English and teachers who could push her to study harder (1st interview, 03/20/2005). When she entered the English department at college, she was very excited about the courses in the department. She became motivated to learn English again. In addition to attending classes, she engaged herself in English-related extracurricular activities such as English storytelling and English songs competitions. In her own leisure time, Kai-Yu sought opportunities to practice her English, such as listening to English radio, seeing movies in English, keeping diaries in English and chatting with friends online (2nd interview, 05/03/2005). She also revealed that she sometimes wrote letters or emails to her English native-speaking pen pal in New Zealand (journal, 06/28/2005).

4.1.2. Kai-Yu's writing strategies

While writing in her electronic portfolio, Kai-Yu reported that she enjoyed keeping a diary and writing anecdotes the most. She noted, "I like to write the diary entries in my portfolio. It's a good way to express myself, and I do like to do this..." (open-ended questionnaire, 06/06/2005). When she was writing, she used a few strategies. First, she used planning as a metacognitive strategy. Before she wrote an English sentence, she usually brainstormed in her mind some tentative sentences. Then, she picked out the best one and wrote it down. In addition, when she wrote an essay, she stated that she drew an outline so that she knew what to write for each paragraph (2nd interview, 05/03/2005). Second, she used resourcing as a cognitive strategy. When she could not think of the right word in English, she usually referred to reference materials such as dictionaries and textbooks. She explained that "When I can not write the word in English, I usually consult with my electronic dictionary or classmates" (2nd interview, 05/03/2005). Third, she used goal-setting as a metacognitive strategy. She set a goal that she would learn how to write better by reading some good essays (2nd interview, 05/03/2005). Finally, she used elaboration of prior knowledge as a cognitive strategy. She used her background knowledge when writing essays in her electronic portfolio. For example, she commented, "...before I do the portfolio, I always review the readings in the textbook. Then, I connect the readings to my experience and think of some

ideas...” (open-ended questionnaire, 06/06/2005). In brief, when approaching specific writing tasks in her electronic portfolio, Kai-Yu employed and varied both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to increase her learning effectiveness. Therefore, in view of Chamot’s (2001) synthesized definition of good language learner, she demonstrated the abilities to monitor language production, practice communicating in the language, make use of prior linguistic knowledge, and use various memorization techniques.

4.1.3. Kai-Yu’s self-assessment practices

While writing in her electronic portfolio, Kai-Yu often engaged herself in evaluating her entries. For instance, Kai-Yu ranked her essay on the topic of leisure time as the best work in her electronic portfolio because she believed that she could connect her writing to her personal experience and express her ideas well. Moreover, in the self-assessment checklist, she wrote “I think the best part is the essay on leisure time because it shows my thoughts completely...” (Self-assessment checklist, 05/20/2005). When she was asked to self-assess her first essay by assigning a score from 1 to 5, she graded her essay with a 3. She then explained by commenting, “...although the writing is not excellent and the ideas are not insightful enough, it presents my effort in linking the assignment to instruction...” (the self-assessment checklist, 05/20/2005). Hence, it became clear that through deciding the best work and rating the entries, she learned to take control over her own learning and to become a more autonomous learner. However, when she was asked if she preferred self-assessment to teacher assessment, she did not seem to have a strong preference for self-assessment. She indicated that “Actually, I accept any way of assessment” (open-ended questionnaire, 06/06/2005). Being accustomed to the teacher’s authority in deciding the evaluation method, she noted that “No matter I like it or not, I don’t think that I have choices. I will just do my job and fulfill the requirements...Grading is teacher’s job...” (3rd interview, 07/05/2005). Her responses pinpointed the cultural factors in self-assessment. Students, in some cultures, including those from Asian cultures, tended to be passive recipients of knowledge who do not take part in the evaluation process. Therefore, cultural acceptance of self-assessment needs to be further raised.

4.2. Case two: A-Ling

4.2.1. A-Ling’s general English learning background

A-Ling has been learning English since her junior high school years. She reported that she thought learning English was not difficult for her at that time because she just needed to

memorize the vocabulary and sentences in the textbooks (1st interview, 03/20/2005). Since she was good at memorization, she always got good grades in English (journal, 06/28/2005). However, she revealed that when she entered senior high school, she realized that learning English was not just memorizing vocabulary; instead, it involved other skills such as listening, grammar and writing. Then, she started to spend some time improving those skills. For example, she read some stories and composition samples to improve her writing skills. After graduating from senior high school, she chose English as her major at college. Among English classes, she enjoyed reading and grammar classes the most. In the reading class, she usually read out loud the texts to improve her reading comprehension. Moreover, she believed that her grammar class helped her build the basic knowledge for composing an essay. Finally, she shared her strategy of learning English, elaborating that she spent one to two hours a day reading in English to improve her English proficiency (journal, 06/28/2005).

4.2.2. A-Ling's writing strategies

It was found that A-Ling employed a number of strategies when writing for her electronic portfolio. First, she used planning as a metacognitive strategy. She usually spent some time drafting when composing an essay. She planned in her mind the content, including topic sentences and supporting ideas. Then, she chose the best ones to write. Second, she used memory strategy. She believed that memorizing more vocabulary could improve her writing ability. Hence, she revealed that “I would memorize more vocabulary to improve my writing ability” (2nd interview, 05/03/2005). Finally, it was noted that she used goal-setting as a metacognitive strategy. To improve her writing ability, she set a goal that she would read more rhetoric and grammar books (open-ended questionnaire, 06/06/2005). As metacognitive knowledge is considered to be essential for the self-regulation of learning (Wenden, 1998), A-Ling's use of planning and goal-setting techniques well illustrated her self-management practices.

4.2.3. A-Ling's self-assessment practices

A-Ling ranked all the artifacts equally and explained that she tried her best in completing every artifact in her electronic portfolio. When she was invited to rate her essay on the topic of leisure time, she assigned it a 4. She elaborated that she wrote down what she has learned from the reading and integrated personal ideas in the essay (self-assessment checklist, 05/20/2005). In addition, she specifically mentioned that she used self-assessment strategies when writing. She constantly checked back on and evaluated her entries in her portfolio. She

reported, "...I often view the entries. Before I put my entries in my portfolio, I've checked them many times..." (open-ended questionnaire, 06/06/2005). Furthermore, when she was asked if she preferred self-assessment to teacher assessment, she expressed that "I accept any method required in class" (3rd interview, 07/05/2005). Similarly, she explained, "...I can give myself a score in the checklist. I think it's informal grading for myself. But, for the midterm exam and final exam, I want teacher to give me grades...I also want my teacher to give me the grade for the entire semester. I feel more comfortable that way because teacher should be the grader...(3rd interview, 07/05/2005).

It was, thus, evident that self-assessment was treated more appropriately as a language learning strategy than as a grading method due to the traditional cultural and educational beliefs in the EFL classrooms.

5. Discussion

5.1. Strategy use

A close analysis of the data revealed that while writing in their electronic portfolios, both EFL learners employed an array of strategies in writing—cognitive strategy including resourcing, memory strategy including rote memorization, and metacognitive strategies including planning, goal-setting, and self-assessment. Since cognitive and memory strategies were typically found to be the most popular strategies with language learners (Oxford, 1990), they were used by these two learners to store and manipulate an amount of information such as new vocabulary and rhetorical expressions. Moreover, among these strategies deployed, metacognitive strategies were used the most. These two EFL learners were distinguished by their awareness of and the ability to apply the appropriate metacognitive strategies for a specific writing task, which was critical to self-regulation of learning (Wenden, 1998). As they planned for, brainstormed some ideas for, and evaluated their writing tasks, they developed their ability to self-manage their own learning. In short, as Rubin (2001) indicated that "skilled self-managed learners possess sufficient knowledge and appropriate well-developed beliefs about self, the learning process, possible strategies, the nature of tasks, and prior knowledge" (p. 26), these two learners developed skills to go about their learning on their own outside the classroom.

5.2. Self-assessment in practice

Electronic portfolios not only provided these two learners with an opportunity to demonstrate their authentic language use but also gave them a chance to reflect on their learning and self-

assess their performance on specific tasks. With multiple artifacts including the drafts of essays documented, electronic portfolios served as a lens through which the students witnessed how their learning evolved. At the same time, they also learned to judge the quality of their work, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it was clear that this practice involved students directly in the assessment process, which helped students understand what it meant to learn a language autonomously (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Furthermore, the learners not merely viewed their past performance or competence but also set goals for improving their writing skills. Hence, goal-setting, one type of metacognitive self-assessment (Brown, 2004), fostered learners' intrinsic motivation for enhancing their writing samples in their electronic portfolios. In sum, the learners became more conscious about self-reflection and autonomy through self-assessment practice while creating electronic portfolios. In other words, they were encouraged to become the self-assessors of their developing capabilities beyond formal education.

5.3. Concerns

Although these two learners practiced self-assessment strategies while writing in their portfolios, they did not have a preference over self-assessment. This could be explained by their concerns about the extent to which they could be involved in the grading process. Brought up in an educational culture where teachers always played a dominant role in grading, the learners perceived that their teachers had the authority and responsibility in grading and were not accustomed to assigning scores for themselves. Thus, despite that they did well on judging the quality of their work, reflecting on their entries, they still relied on teacher judgment to produce a score. The results corresponded with previous studies (Blue, 1994; Chen, 2005; Harris, 1997) that since self-assessment changed the traditional teacher-learner relationship, it might be quite challenging and dubious to EFL learners. In short, EFL learners tended to worry about self-assessment when it came to grading.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated how EFL learners exercised self-assessment strategies while writing in their electronic portfolios. It has been found that the two participating EFL learners employed cognitive, memory, metacognitive strategies to approach specific writing tasks, followed by self-assessment strategies to develop their ability to self-manage their own English learning. While practicing self-assessment strategies, they judged the quality of their entries by identifying strengths and weaknesses, reflected on the learning process by

constantly reviewing essays before posting them onto the portfolios. Therefore, it is evident that serving as a tool that collects both learning process and product, electronic portfolios afforded students a chance to exercise self-assessment strategies.

Nevertheless, while self-assessment was embraced as a strategy to promote language learning, it was confronted with such thorny issues in EFL contexts as students' unfamiliarity and contradicting teacher-student power relationship. With an uncertainty of the extent to which they could be involved in grading process, students still relied heavily on teacher judgment on the score. Hence, it can be concluded that self-assessment functioned well as a language learning strategy; however, practicing it as a grading instrument for EFL students might warrant further research efforts before its effectiveness could be determined.

Finally, the results from the study suggested some pedagogical implications for EFL teachers. First, to mitigate EFL students' unfamiliarity with self-assessment, EFL teachers could seek assistance from electronic portfolios and make them as a platform for practicing self-assessment. With concrete, recorded evidence of learning, electronic portfolios enable learners to monitor how their language learning processes develop. In other words, rather than retrieving their past performance from memory, students, while self-evaluating their language skills, can capitalize on their portfolios that document their learning process through multiple drafts and make informed decisions. Second, to grapple with the concern about the changing teacher-student relationships arising from the incorporation of self-assessment practices into classrooms in the Asian educational milieu, EFL teachers need to raise students' cultural acceptance of self-assessment through increasing student involvement and redefining teachers' role. Involving students in establishing assessment criteria not merely empowers them but creates an opportunity for them to take responsibility for their learning. Moreover, EFL teachers need to redefine their roles and provide systematic training and constant guidance. As facilitators who encourage student autonomy, teachers need to continually help learners review their own language progress so that learners can be fully aware of their learning and find self-assessment as an effective language learning strategy.

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Appendix I: Sample Interview Questions

1. When did you start to learn English?
2. Did you like English when you first started to learn it? Why? Why not?
3. Can you talk about how you learned English when you were in junior high school and senior high school?
4. Were your learning experiences at junior high school and senior high school different? Why?
5. Among the classes you are taking and have taken in the department, which one do you enjoy most and which one do you dislike? Why?
6. What are some ways you do to improve your English?
7. What are your goals for writing in this semester?
8. Do you like to write in English? What do you like to write? (summary of a article, diary, essay?) Why?
9. Do you plan before you write an essay in your portfolio? How?
10. Describe the procedure when you write an essay in your e-portfolio?
11. What are some ways you do to make your essay better?
12. How do you improve your English writing? What are your strategies?
13. What could you do to be a better writer?

Appendix II: Questionnaire

What do you like about creating your portfolio? Why?

Answer:

2. What do you dislike about creating your portfolio?

Answer:

Besides the assigned homework, do you put something else in your portfolio? What are they? Why do you put them in your portfolio?

Answer:

Which part of your portfolio do you think can best represent you? Why?

Answer:

What do you plan to include in your portfolio besides the homework? Why?

Answer:

Do you often view the artifacts in your portfolio? Can you identify what you can do better next time?

Answer:

Do you think if portfolio can document your English learning progress? If it can, in what ways?

Answer:

What do you think about the feedback from your classmates? Are they helpful? Why/why not?

Answer:

Does the portfolio help you make sense of what you are learning in class?

Examples!

Answer:

Do you think if doing portfolio can enhance the communication with classmates and the teacher? How?

Answer:

Which skills (including reading, writing, speaking and listening) do you think you improved from doing the portfolio? Why?

Answer:

Do you prefer being assessed by portfolio or traditional paper-and-pencil tests? Or both? Why?

Answer:

Is there any concern/disadvantage of creating your portfolio?

Answer:

Other:

Appendix III: Self-assessment checklist

What are the best parts of your portfolio?

Journals on English learning experience

Essay on the topic of leisure time

Essay on the impact of TV on our lives

Self-chosen artifacts, including diary, pictures and so on

Other: _____

How would you rate your portfolio from 1 to 5 (1 means poor, 5 means excellent)? Why?

Answer:

1 point: Poor

2 points: Not good

3 points: Fair

4 points: Good

5 points: Excellent

Why: _____

Please look at your essay on leisure time, what are your strengths and weaknesses? Why do you think they are? What would you rate it from 1 to 5?

Answer:

1 point: Poor

2 points: Not good

3 points: Fair

4 points: Good

5 points: Excellent

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____

Please look at your essay on the impact of TV on our lives, what are your strengths and weaknesses? Why do you think they are? How would you rate it from 1 to 5?

Answer:

1 point: Poor

2 points: Not good

3 points: Fair

4 points: Good

5 points: Excellent

Strengths: _____

Weaknesses: _____



Improving School English in Malaysia Through Participation in Online Threaded Discussion Groups

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Abstract

In the digital and contemporary world, online communication is part of the daily lives of many Malaysian adolescents. Net chat, weblogs and threaded discussion groups are some of the channels through which these young people interact not only among themselves but also with those outside their circle. Based on the findings of a qualitative study of the writing in English by a group of Form 4 (Year 10) students in an urban school in Penang, Malaysia, this paper presents some characteristics of the interaction of a group of adolescent boys in an online threaded discussion group. The discussion includes the boys' use of a language hybrid that mixes local expressions as well as short forms with English and their observation of a set of ground rules to sustain discussion. Using the features highlighted the paper suggests how this form of engagement can be used by the Malaysian teacher concerned with improving school English.

Keywords: online communication, out-of-school literacy, adolescents, language hybrid

1.0 Introduction

A study on the writing in English by a group of Form 4 (Year 10) students in an urban school

in Penang, Malaysia (Tan, 2005) reveals a range of diverse writing products for formal and informal settings. The students switched routinely between the various forms of writing, fully aware of the purposes each served for them. Outside of school, Net chat, weblogs and threaded discussion groups are some of the channels through which these young people interacted not only among themselves but also with those outside their circle. Based on the exchange in an online discussion group this paper discusses some pedagogical implications for the English classroom in Malaysia.

The first part of the paper reviews the literature on out-of-school literacy practices together with a few related studies that provide evidence of adolescents' literacy practices beyond school. This is followed by a description of the Malaysian context. The third section describes the study briefly. The fourth section discusses some ways the Malaysian ESL teacher can tap students' technology-mediated use of informal English outside of school for their own learning. The paper ends with a call to ESL/EFL teachers to acknowledge as well as capitalize on students' out-of-school literacy practices to support the teaching of school English.

2. Literature review

Over the years, out-of-school literacy practices have emerged as a major research strand within the fields of education and literacy. When literacy is viewed from a social practice perspective (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Gee, 1996), out-of-school literacy practices (Hull & Schultz, 2001) become a valid area of study for the insights they offer regarding adolescents' everyday literacy experiences in multiple contexts and how these practices can aid classroom instruction.

In the area of writing, there have been studies on out-of-school or non-school practices in diverse educational settings. For example, 'vernacular writing' documented by Camitta (1993), 'collaborative playful writing' by Shuman (1993) and written notes containing highly coded messages by Finders (1996). In addition, Moje's (2000) study found products such as poetry, parody, graffiti, tags, letters and notes written by students who identified themselves as gangsters or affiliated to gangster groups while Schultz's (2002) participants wrote poems, letters, journals, plays, fiction and nonfiction prose.

Adolescents' engagement in writing on the Internet has also attracted the attention of some researchers. While Duncan & Leander (2000) found young women writing in spaces provided by advertising networks, Knobel & Lankshear (2002) revealed innovative, creative and non-conforming adolescent writers publishing 'zines' online. Similarly Guzzetti &

Gamboa (2005) wrote about 'online journaling,' the literacy practice of two adolescent girls. Studies by Black (2005), Chandler-Olcott & Mahar (2003) and Thomas (2005) are about online fan fiction writing. Fans of popular works that include Japanese Manga and the Harry Potter series meet virtually to read and comment on their own creation of, for example, a parallel plot or reconstructed episode. One main implication shared by all these studies is that teachers should find ways to exploit students' self-motivated and keen engagement in such forms of literacy mediated by digital technologies.

In the area of computer-mediated communication (CMC), Beach & Lundell (1998) draw our attention to the literacy practices of young adolescents at home with computer technologies and call for their recognition as skilful readers and writers in the digital world. The use of CMC not only provides a social and stimulating context for these adolescents to support each other and grow as readers and writers within the discourses on the net but also helps them be competent in school discourses. One example is participation in online threaded discussion groups. This form of communication has been used to interest students in working on their assigned texts in their literature classes (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Wolsey, 2004). In the Saudi EFL context, Al-Jarf (2007) shows some examples of student-student and student-instructor interactions, evidence of the positive effects of her online course on freshman students' creative writing of poems and short stories.

As blogging becomes more popular among adolescents, this online publishing tool intrigues teachers. Read (2006) explains that blogging can meet the 'relateness and growth needs' of the adolescent blogger. Unlike school writing, blogging allows freedom of expression, anonymity and immediate response from a wider audience. As such blogging is inherently interactive and motivating. Classroom writing experiences can incorporate features of blogging to tap into students' motivation. For example the teacher can request for shorter drafts, peer response and give more freedom to students in the choice of topics and formats. In addition, personal journals, bulletin boards and electronic portfolios, all of which encourage interaction, sharing and collaboration, are some uses of weblogs in the classroom (Weiler, 2003). Taking this use of blogs a step further, Hunt & Hunt (2007) advocate teaching blogging than just writing with blogs. It requires students to be literate in hyperlinking to keep a research log as well as post comments on course content and classmates' posts by referring to source materials elsewhere. The connectivity provided by hyperlinks makes writing meaningful and authentic.

Placing the data for this article against the background of the literature above, the present paper proposes some ways to use Malaysian students' threaded discussions on the Internet to

contribute to the learning of school English and school writing. The discussion is within the context of Malaysian society but it is hoped that the recommendations are also beneficial to teachers and students in similar contexts.

3. The local context

Officially English is a second language in Malaysia whose population is made up of mainly Malays, Chinese and Indians. English is a compulsory school subject next to Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language as well as the medium of instruction in national schools. However, as a result of a recent major policy shift in 2003, English is the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics. Other than learning these two languages, school children are also given the choice of learning Mandarin and Tamil.

Given the varied educational and family backgrounds of Malaysians living in a multiracial and multicultural society, the linguistic acquisition pathways of individuals are multiple and complex (Gaudart, 1987). Malaysians are generally observed to have a linguistic repertoire that may include a combination of English, Bahasa Malaysia and its various dialects, Mandarin, Chinese dialects (such as Hokkien and Cantonese), Tamil, Punjabi and the languages of East Malaysian ethnic groups such as Iban and Bidayuh. These languages and dialects are sometimes not used in their pure forms but contain words borrowed from other languages and dialects in the repertoire.

For some Malaysians, English could be their first, second, or even third language. In fact a number of educators feel that the term TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is more applicable than TESL in the country. In everyday communication, not every one uses the Queen's English. In many instances Manglish (Lee, 1998) is preferred. Lee's compilation of Manglish terms shows the influence of vernacular languages on English. One example is the expression *lah* which often appears at the end of a word, phrase or sentence. To speak Manglish is to be uniquely Malaysian and differentiated from other native speakers of English. In technology-mediated communication such as emails, online threaded discussions, blogs and phone texting (SMS), another form of English surfaces (Tan, 2005). This may include the use of emoticons and a hybrid form of English containing local terms and short forms.

Seen from Kachru's (1985) model, Malaysia clearly does not fall within the Inner Circle. This circle comprises mainly countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA and the UK, where English is the mother tongue of a predominantly monolingual population. Malaysia is more suitably located within the Outer Circle made up of nations with a colonial

past. English, while recognized in many domains of the society and has an important status in language policies as well as mainstream education, is only one of the languages in the multilingual repertoires of the people. Speakers of English in the Outer Circle range from highly competent to poor users. Even from the perspective of Rajadurai's (2005) proposed, more fluid model, the majority of Malaysians do not constitute the core of competent users of English or Englishes.

In formal education, students are taught and evaluated on their use of the four language skills in English. Writing at the upper secondary school level covers a variety of text-types, most of which are confined to an examination genre. Writing tasks include, for example, a 350-word narrative essay or expository essay, a formal letter of complaint and a guided essay based on a given outline. Outside the school this type of writing is hardly used. However, as mentioned earlier, the out-of-school context is not devoid of writing in English. Within the class of students in the study there are forms of non-sanctioned writing, which differ from assigned school writing in terms of purpose, form and content. Interestingly students are using English to communicate outside the formal learning context, although it is not their first language.

4. The study

This qualitative study on the writing in English of a class of 31 students in an urban secondary school in Penang, Malaysia involved a 6-month period of fieldwork. During this period KE (one of the authors) was a participant observer at the research site. The participants were made up of nine girls, 22 boys and their English teacher. The students were 16 years old and at the time of the study, they had undergone nine years of formal learning of English.

The study began initially with a focus on school writing where 11 writing lessons of 70 minutes duration, scheduled by the teacher, were observed. The research questions used to explore the Malaysian English learning context were "How do discursive practices in an ESL writing class affect how students write?" and "How do classroom discursive practices account for writing difficulties?" However as the research progressed the focus was expanded to include out-of-school writing as well. This part of the study was guided by the question, "What is the role of different Discourses in the construction of self both in the writing class and in out-of-school contexts? A substantial discussion of this research question can be found in Tan (2006).

The present paper has taken data from the second part of the study to further discuss

pedagogical implications. Data for this paper were obtained mainly from one initial semi structured interview and two shorter follow up interviews. In response to interview questions like the following, the participants related their use of English in computer mediated communication (CMC) such as Netchat, emails and forum postings or threaded discussions.

- I. What kinds of writing do you do in English (e.g. essays, messages, email, netchat, letters, songs, poems, diary, etc.) in school and out of school?
 - (a) How often do you do this?
 - (b) Who do you share your writing with?
 - (c) Why do you do so?
- II. How important is English to you now and in the future?
 - (a) What do you use English for now?
 - (b) Name some activities that you do not need English for now.

They provided the addresses of websites, which they frequented and allowed KE to access these sites in her own time. She then visited these websites as an onlooker to view their participation over a range of topics and activities. The segment of data displayed below is quite similar to other segments and thus is used to discuss the features of the participants' online exchanges. However future studies should be more extensive, involving more participants, so as to capture adolescents' literacy practices in a variety of websites and across varied discourse communities. Communication in communities (interest groups, cultural groups, etc.) made up of members who are not only locals would surely provide further insights into their use of English online.

Data analysis had an overall process consistent with Fairclough's (1995) dimensions of description, interpretation and explanation in examining qualitative data. The analysis of the students' discourse was guided by Gee's (1996) analysis of social languages and Gee & Green's (1998) four interconnected social "building tasks" that are constructed in oral or written texts to show what people accomplish through language use or discourse. In the analysis of social languages Gee (1996) has proposed studying "sense-making" through five interrelated linguistic systems that constitute discourse, namely "prosody," "cohesion," "discourse organization," "contextualization signals" and "thematic organization." Cohesion and contextualization signals were particularly useful for our purpose. Cohesion was how the sentences and ideas were linked to convey meaning, while contextualization signals helped to construct the context and the positions of the speaker, hearer, writer or reader in relation to each other and to the world.

The analysis of data was further guided by the following questions based on an understanding of Gee & Green's (1998) tasks of:

World building

- What are the channels of communication being used in the situation, the situated meanings of the words in the discourse, the cultural models referred to, the institutions, communities of practice, and/or discourses being (re-)produced or challenged?

Activity building

- What is this activity part of?

Identity building

- What expectations, relationships and identities are constructed and/or signalled in this activity?
- How do these expectations, relationships and identities relate to personal, social and cultural values and beliefs?

Connection building

- What intertextual links are present in the discourse and how are they established?

These questions were adapted from the representative questions suggested by Gee & Green (1998) to give "a more comprehensive picture of the social world, the actors and their actions, and what the actors are accomplishing socially" (p. 139).

The purpose of the present paper is to describe the characteristics of an online threaded discussion and discuss some pedagogical applications and implications for English teachers working among non-native speakers. It includes a call to make the recommendations the subject of research so as to strengthen the case for providing an online learning environment, especially in Malaysian schools.

5. An online threaded discussion and recommendations for the classroom

As defined by Wolsey (2004), a threaded discussion occurs through an electronic medium such as 'an e-mail distribution list, listserv, online conference group, an Internet-based bulletin board service, or a bulletin board established on a local area network.' Unlike real-time communication, the participants interact asynchronously, that is to say, they contribute to an ongoing discussion at their convenience.

In this study, a group of boys, under the leadership of monaymonay, has just created a website where members could post their views on a number of threads or topics. The

following excerpt is taken from a threaded discussion. This set of asynchronous exchanges, reproduced in a simplified layout below, took place between 15 and 29 April 2004 on a forum known as “*Kopitiam*,” a Hokkien (a popular Chinese dialect in Penang) term which literally means “coffeeshop.” Coffeeshops, commonly sighted in Malaysian towns, are the favourite haunts of those in search of some snacks, drinks and conversation partners. In a relaxed atmosphere, a lot of talk, whether idle or serious, takes place. “*Kopitiam*” is acknowledged here as a cybercafé that seems to fulfill similar social purposes.

monaymonay is the administrator (ADMIN) of this forum while *hilluk* plays the role of a moderator (MOD). Three other participants of the excerpt are *o10+01o*, *D@rk* and *B@byw@y*. This particular thread is specially dedicated to improving the website and begins with ADMIN asking for suggestions.

1	<i>monaymonay</i>	post your suggestions or requests here and, ADMIN or MOD will reply ASAP
2	<i>o10+01o</i>	put less sub forums cause penang ppl don't make use of it
3	<i>monaymonay</i>	sub forum are important to make the category keep organize we should train penang people to b more observing ☺ so i think itz good ler
4	<i>D@rk</i>	ban ken's IP address... he spam too much ☺
5	<i>o10+01o</i>	i agree with you ADMIN and 1 more requet warn those ppl that post any of our class's member's picture
6	<i>D@rk</i>	got bug at hardware forum... when i click on my topic “GE FORCE 6800 HIT 14k” it automatically close my window..!
7	<i>monaymonay</i>	no mentioning of names please. baby way n king of hacker will b ban
8	<i>B@byw@y</i>	admin ar...me want 2 become mod...open a new forum which is about music....guitar tabs 1...can

		bo...?n wat have i done...? y kena warning so much 1...?
9	<i>o10+01o</i>	you ask yourself the answer is in your head
10	<i>hilluk</i>	<i>o10+01o</i> answer ppl politely lar KinG OF HackeR look thru all ur post most of them r spam post dat is y u always kena lar

Source: Retrieved Sept 1, 2004, from

<http://monaymonay.2.forumer.com/index.php?showtopic=44>

The first suggestion, contributed by *o10+01o*, is on reducing the number of subforums, which are subtopics within a bigger forum. For example, two subtopics under *Kopitiam* in which the group was participating in were “Cupid’s Corner” and “Jokes Heaven.” The suggestion here is however countered by *monaymonay* who is concerned with the organization of posts according to categories and the need to train users to be more organized. The next post is from *D@rk* asking that Ken (a fellow classmate whose screen name is *B@byw@y*) be banned from using the forum on the grounds that he ‘spam too much.’ He includes a smiley perhaps to indicate his glee should Ken get the punishment he deserves.

Post 5 is *o10+01o*’s agreement with *monaymonay* regarding subforums. And he also requests that *monaymonay* warns those who include members’ photographs in their posts. He is not happy that photographs of a couple of classmates have appeared in their threaded discussions. He is concerned that anonymity is preserved and the privacy of group members protected and respected. In response to him, *monaymonay* in Post 7 reminds members of the ground rule to use only screen names. He also announces his decision to ban *B@byw@y* and king of hacker (another member of the group) from the forum. On a separate issue, *D@rk* complains about a technical problem in Post 6.

After two references to him in Post 4 and 7, both of which carry antagonistic messages about him, *B@byw@y* now posts his say. Firstly he seeks *monaymonay*’s permission to start a new thread on guitaring. Then he challenges *monaymonay* (and the rest of the group) over the decision on his membership. Paraphrased, he asks what he has done to deserve such warning. This draws immediate responses from *o10+01o* and *hilluk* (the moderator). *o10+01o* points out that the answer is obvious (‘in your head’) while *hilluk* reveals that a

check has been done to confirm *D@rk's* earlier accusation. As moderator, *hilluk* also asks *o10+01o* to answer *B@byw@y* politely.

As can be observed, the excerpt

- a. contains the use of short forms commonly employed in digital texting (for example, ppl – people, b – be, n – and, r – are, ur – your), emoticons (the smiley) and local tail-ender expressions such as *ler*, *l*, *lar*, *ar*, which have no particular meaning but serve to indicate insider status and friendship ties. More on the use of this hybridized language is found in Tan (2006) and Tan & Richardson (2006).
- b. constitutes a coherent, purposeful set of exchanges understood by the members themselves. While some postings are directed at specific individuals, the invitation to the rest to join in the arguing, challenging or sparring with one another is implicit. The exchange is also equitable.
- c. displays the specific roles of the administrator, moderator and ordinary members. In ensuring the smooth operation of the website the administrator exercises his power to ban any member who does not abide by a set of ground rules. Technical problems are also referred to the administrator who is entrusted with the task of upgrading the site. He manages the website with the help of the moderator.
- d. contains numerous grammatical errors.

The nature of the communication in this small virtual group can be put to productive use by the teacher in the following areas of essay writing, teaching of literature and error correction. It is the hope of the authors that these do not remain as classroom ideas but will be investigated in research to contribute to effective teaching and learning in an online environment for the Malaysian as well as the larger ESL/EFL context.

Essay writing

Like studies on the use of threaded discussion groups for the teaching of literature (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Wolsey, 2004), the Malaysian teacher can similarly divide the class into a number of discussion groups to complete a writing task in which students first brainstorm the contents for an essay and then co-write it as a group.

Following the principles of cooperative learning, the members can work together and be jointly accountable for the group's performance in the assigned task. Each group will choose a leader (ADMIN), a content expert (MOD 1) and a language expert (MOD 2). The leader

ensures that not only the group members stay on task but also everyone participates as it cannot be denied that in such a learning situation, there will be individuals who prefer to be bystanders. The content expert clarifies, puts together and organizes the input from the other members while the language expert is consulted on grammatical problems and helps to edit the language used. Should there be any problems that the group cannot solve on their own, the monitors can consult the teacher for help.

An appropriate period of time should be given for a task so that students have sufficient time to participate in their threaded discussion. If the school does not have the facilities to hold the discussion during the English period, students can work on their assignment at home. In class the teacher can provide a printout of their postings for further clarification and follow-up work. The asynchronous communication in a threaded discussion offers great flexibility for the students to respond to one another at a time convenient to them. Unlike synchronous chat, asynchronous interaction does not pressure participants to respond instantly but allows time for reflection. The students can take more time to write longer responses elsewhere and upload them onto the threaded discussion. What is produced is, therefore, more likely to be thoughtfully written.

Teaching of literature

The Malaysian English syllabus at the secondary school level has a literature component, in which students are given a number of set literary texts to read, appreciate and respond to. To help students accomplish this, the teacher can post questions or issues related to a literary text and invite members of a threaded discussion group to post their views. For example, for the school set text titled “*The Pearl*” by John Steinbeck, the following questions can be posted:

1. Which event in *The Pearl* do you find most memorable?
2. If you could change the ending of the story, what change/change/s would you make?
3. Discuss the main themes of the novel.
4. Which character in the novel do you find most interesting?

Hopefully with the teacher’s encouragement and constant monitoring, the interaction that ensues will be self-sustaining, coherent and interactive, just like the excerpt of the threaded discussion given. These ‘traditional lesson questions’ may come alive as students contribute and support their views while commenting on their classmates’ input. The asynchronous mode also encourages a more reasoned and critical response since students have more time not only to reflect on the text and views posted but also compose their own comments. To

further facilitate the exchange of views, leaders (ADMIN) and monitors (MODs) can be elected.

However, to prevent students from slipping into the use of an informal register prevalent in short messages, the teacher should model the content and language appropriate for an academic discussion of a literary text in his or her own contributions to the discussion. There is a need for implicit and explicit instruction on this. In addition the teacher can set the ground rules for what is acceptable in terms of the mechanics of writing and the use of emoticons.

Error correction

In the secondary school in Malaysia, due to time constraints and other factors, the English teacher seldom allocates time for the systematic teaching of grammar. To improve in his/her grammar, the student relies a lot on the incidental teaching of grammar in class and the teacher's feedback on work submitted.

Students' online communication such as the example above is a rich source of input for a variety of language work that includes error correction and practice in sentence construction. For example,

- a. "warn those ppl that post any of our class's member's picture" can direct attention to singular/plural nouns and the use of the apostrophe. The teacher can highlight these grammatical errors and ask students to post the corrected sentence. Based on this input the teacher can give further clarification. Peer correction is also an alternative since every student has access to the discussion.
- b. "y kena warning so much 1" (*kena* is a Malay word that means "get") can be re-constructed as "Why have I received so much warning?" Students can be asked to identify forms of informal, colloquial and hybridized language use and convert them into formal English. In addition, for this example, students can practice formulating grammatically correct questions.
- c. "he spam too much" and "it automatically close my window" can be used to highlight the topic on subject verb agreement.

Admittedly, even without the use of threaded discussion groups, grammatical errors can still be addressed. However this usually occurs on a one-on-one basis. When every one's input is posted on a common site, students' awareness of errors is increased. Since not every student commits the same errors, it gives the opportunity for some to spot the errors of their peers and for others to benefit from peer correction.

This exercise, together with the teacher's modeling of academic language, helps towards improving the students' command of grammar. Moreover, the use of technology, which offers a definite break from the traditional classroom approach, is likely to provide a stimulating environment to engage the students in a topic as uninteresting as grammar.

6. Conclusion

This paper draws our attention to the communication of a group of adolescents in a threaded discussion group and explores its potential for supporting reading and writing as well as grammar work among Malaysian ESL learners. The argument is that English teachers can act as onlookers and facilitators of students' online discussion not only to help them achieve writing goals and correct grammatical errors but also to increase their use of English.

In the Malaysian context, interacting among fellow classmates in an Internet forum such as the one highlighted in this paper constitutes a literacy practice that involves writing in English. However, literacy practices on the Internet are rarely acknowledged or exploited by English teachers in the classroom. Perhaps these teachers fear that bringing the hybridized language and its alternative content into the classroom signals acceptance of such forms in school. This does not have to be so. Outside the classroom students can still continue to connect with each other in their informal and creative use of the English language. In multilingual and multicultural Malaysian society, part of the linguistic repertoires of ESL users is this variety of English, which they use as a social language. What is important is their awareness of their different competencies and the ability to switch to school English when the need arises. This may require the teacher to "heteroglossize" English in the classroom (Lin & Luk, 2005) as well as capitalize on students' use of informal English to teach school English (Lam, 2000). The present paper has taken up both these recommendations.

Integrating technology in English literacy instruction has a number of implications. Topping the list is the need for teachers to be well trained and prepared to initiate changes in the classroom. In the context of using threaded discussion groups, the teachers themselves may have to look for the appropriate software and set up the network for the students. It may mean that they have to be techno-savvy, like some of their adolescent students. Pedagogically, the teachers have to look into issues of monitoring and assessing students' work and supplementing threaded discussion with supporting tasks such as grammar exercises. On the students' part, it will mean being connected at home to the threaded discussion network. For families in the lower income bracket, this is almost impossible to

achieve. In this regard, the school should work towards equipping itself more fully with the appropriate facilities and offering a more flexible timetable to enable students to go online.

Lastly, the creative use of English by the participants in this study supports calls to expand the study of SLA. It is essential to undertake research on L2 learning and use in social contexts, which are not homogeneous, monolingual or monocultural and to which learners acculturate (Pavlenko, 2002). This, we believe, also extends to the EFL context where the learning and acquisition of English are impacted by the use of digital and cyber technologies.

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Teacher-Student Relationship and the Conceptualization of the “Good Language Teacher”: Does Culture Matter?

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Abstract

This study examines the dimensions in teacher-student relationship in the language classroom. It also explores the most and the least desirable qualities of the language teacher as perceived by a cohort of Malaysian university students, and the hierarchy of these qualities. It has been proposed that cultural mores predominant within a particular society would determine the patterns of teacher-student interpersonal communication and influence the learners' perceptions of their teachers. The present study adopts some relevant frameworks developed in other academic disciplines to examine these issues. Participants in this study were one hundred students learning the Russian language at Universiti Malaysia Sabah. This study employed Gardner's (1985) instrument as a research tool; two open-ended questions about language teacher's most and least desirable qualities were added to the instrument. Results of the quantitative analysis of the data showed that teacher-student relationship is built along clearly identifiable dimensions. Qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions revealed that the students' perceptions of a “good teacher” are less culturally bound than it has been reported in some previous studies; three most desirable for the teacher qualities (i.e., caring/empathetic, patient, friendly) are all relationship-oriented.

Key words: teacher-student relationship, language teaching/learning, teacher characteristics, culture, Asian educational context, Malaysia

Introduction

In the past two decades there has occurred a marked shift from the cognitive to the affective realm in the field of pedagogy; issues related to teacher-student classroom interaction as well as the conceptualization of a “good” teacher have gained prominence. Researchers and educators also recognize a fact that the classroom proceedings as well as the patterns of

teacher-student interaction are influenced by culture and social mores predominant within the society where the teaching/learning takes place (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

The current study focuses on the language classroom and explores teacher-student relationship. It employs relevant frameworks developed in other academic disciplines. First of all, considering a fact that research in the area of interpersonal relationship has been developed in the field of social psychology “the applications of research on interpersonal relationships is especially useful” (Hammer, 2005, p. 3). Secondly, as Oxford et al. (1998) observed, “The classroom environment implies a set of *power* relationships, which are almost always asymmetrical” (p. 6). Therefore, our study will look at the teacher-student relationship through the prism of the “power distance” and the “hierarchy vs. egalitarianism” concepts developed in culture studies.

The majority of previous studies on teacher-student relationship involved either a generic classroom (i.e., not related to any particular subject) or on the science and mathematics classroom (Khine & Fisher, 2004). In the field of language pedagogy, discussion on the teacher-student interpersonal relationship and the students’ expectations from their teacher has been somewhat limited. This is especially puzzling because the language classroom involves a much more intensive interaction between the teacher and students compared to the lecture-delivered lessons. The current paper intends to address this gap.

The present study is motivated by classroom needs and focuses on the language classroom where the teacher (who is Russian) and the language learners (who are all Malaysians) do not share the similar educational backgrounds. In this situation, an insight into the learners’ perceptions of the teacher-students interaction could be particularly important. The aims of the current study are: (1) to explore dimensions in the teacher-student relationship as perceived by a group of Malaysian university students, (2) to find out the most and the least desirable qualities assigned to the language teacher by the students, and to assess the hierarchy of these qualities, and (3) to examine whether the students’ frames of references regarding the relationship with their language teacher and their expectations regarding the teacher’s role are culturally bound.

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the data. Factor analysis is used to determine the dimensions around which the students’ perceptions of their language teachers are formed. A qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions that sought the students’ opinions of the most and the least desirable qualities of the language teacher is carried out next. The participants in this inquiry were 100 students learning a foreign (Russian) language at Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

Background to the Study

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country with the population of approximately 28 million people. Its various ethnic groups include Malay (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%), indigenous people (11%), Indian (7.1%), and others (7.8%). The official language of the country is Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay language). Other widely spoken languages are English, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, and Foochow dialects), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Thai, Iban, Bidayuh (in the state of Sarawak), Kadazan, and Dusun (in the state of Sabah).

In Malaysian government schools at primary and secondary levels the Malay and English languages are compulsory subjects. Though the medium of instruction is Malay, mathematics and science subjects are taught in English. To be admitted to a local public university, students must undertake Malaysian University English Test (MUET) where Band 6 represents the highest level of proficiency.

The Tamil or Mandarin languages are taught in Tamil and Chinese vernacular schools, respectively. Also, the Arabic language is taught in some schools. In the past years, the government has been encouraging the study of Tamil, Mandarin or Arabic as a third language in government schools. However, foreign languages are not a part of school curriculum. This means that despite a fact that the majority of university students are fluent in two or more languages and/or dialects, very few of them have had an experience of learning a foreign language.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), where this study was conducted, is a large public university situated in the state of Sabah in East Malaysia. The study of a foreign language (e.g., French, Japanese, Russian, Spanish) or a local language (e.g., Kadazan-Dusun, Tamil) is compulsory for the UMS students who obtained Bands 4, 5, and 6 of the MUET. The students can choose any language course offered by the university depending on the availability. The duration of foreign language program is three semesters with three contact hours per week.

Literature Review and the Scope of the Current Study

Conceptions of Teacher-Student Interaction and the Cultural Context

Classroom has been described as an ecosystem, which is a part of the “larger system of the school, which itself is a component in a wider system, comprising community and culture”; in this complex structure, “culture is overriding” (Biggs 1998, p. 733). In a broad definition culture includes values, beliefs, practices, and worldviews of a group of people (Ziegahn,

2001, p. 2). Culture is both a product of a social group and the determinant of social norms and patterns of social interaction as well as individual's behaviours within and outside the group.

In the context of education, researchers have pointed out that conceptions of and approaches to teaching and learning differ among cultures (Biggs, 1998). As Cortazzi and Jin (1996) observed, teacher's and students' classroom behaviour is shaped by "taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn. . . and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education" (p. 169). These "taken for granted frameworks" that the teacher and students refer to in their interpersonal interactions are constructed by socio-cultural norms predominant within society and are described as "culture of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

The present study recognizes a fact that in Asia, as anywhere else, culture in general and culture of learning in particular are not monolithic entities. However, as Mangubhai (1997) suggested, "... it is possible to discern certain patterns of behavior, or primary tendencies within a cultural or sub-cultural group that permit one to address learners as a group" (p. 24). The focus of the current paper is on the Malaysian university language learners.

For the current paper, the following dimensions in cultural differences from the perspective of inter-personal relationship are especially pertinent: (1) "power distance", and (2) "hierarchy versus egalitarianism". First of all, the concept of "power distance" (PD) was developed by Hofstede (1984) who conducted a seminal research on the corporate culture of a major multinational corporation (IBM) in different countries and cultural contexts. Power distance has been conceptualized as a degree of inequity in power, wealth and status distribution within a particular culture (Hofstede, 1991). In countries with a high acceptance of PD, authority is exercised openly and inter-personal communication always reflects the differences in the participants' status.ⁱ

Differences in the PD acceptance influence instructional patters. Hofstede (1986) maintained that in the classroom within a culture with a greater degree of PD, the teacher is highly respected by the students; the teacher is in charge of and holds a tight control over the classroom proceedings. Reportedly, in the Asian educational context, the teacher imparts information unidirectionally while the students receive and memorize the new facts and data (Cogan, 1995). On the other hand, in the classroom within the Western educational context the most culturally appropriate role for the teacher would be that of a facilitator and a resource person while the students often ask their teachers questions during the class

(Andersen & Powell, 1991).

Secondly, the “hierarchy versus egalitarianism” dimension was developed by Schwartz (1994). Schwartz contended that a society that values hierarchy would encourage its members to behave according to each person’s social position. On the other hand, a society that promotes egalitarianism values cooperation between its members regardless of their social status. Within the “hierarchy vs. egalitarianism” dimension, the Asian and Confucian heritage cultures (CHC) are usually placed into the first category (i.e. they are described as “hierarchical”), while the Western countries are described as more egalitarian societies. Classroom, being a part of a larger system would reflect these attitudes. Thus, in the Asian educational context, teachers would be viewed as -- and expected to be -- the classroom authority. By contrast, teachers in the Western countries would rather avoid stressing who is in charge of the classroom and would try to elicit cooperation from their students.

Through the prism of these cultural dimensions, educational system in the Asian context has been described in many research studies as teacher-centered and hierarchical (Aldridge, Fraser & Huang, 1999; Biggs, 1998; Biggs & Watkins, 1996; Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth, 2004). Some studies have examined how the cultural norms and expectations translated into the classroom practices. Sripathy (1998), for example, argued that in the Asian context conceptualization of the teacher as partner would be culturally inappropriate since the teacher is seen within society at large as a transmitter of knowledge and a figure commanding respect. In a similar vein, Tan (2005) maintained that “most children in Singapore are culturally conditioned to expect their teacher to be the authoritative figure in a teacher-centered environment” (p. 24). Biggs (1998) contended that in “the CHC teacher-student interaction is not lubricated with the democratic oil of warmth and first names, but with the oil of respect, which is a more effective lubricant in a hierarchical, collectivistic culture” (p. 730). To concur, Aldridge et al. (1999) positioned that in an exam-driven and result-oriented educational system the focus of the teacher-student relationship was on the development of the student’s academic ability while the family was expected to take care of the emotional side of the student’s education.

Society’s expectations from a teacher determine the teacher-student interactional patterns. Sripathy (1998) posited that Singaporean teachers did not praise and encourage their students often because such behaviour might diminish the teacher’s authority. Biggs and Watkins (1996) maintained that in Hong Kong relationship between teacher and students tended to be cold and hierarchy-driven rather than warm and egalitarian. A number of studies have contended that in Asian cultures learning was viewed as a serious task and not as a source of

enjoyment. Educational systems in many Asian countries have been described as exam-driven and result-oriented where the traditional pattern “teacher as mentor” and “student as obedient disciple” may be the preferred mode of communication.

Based on these argumentations, a number of questions regarding teacher-student classroom interaction within the Asian educational contexts arise:

- (1) along which dimensions does the teacher-student interaction evolve?
- (2) would the emotional connection between the teacher and his or her students be lacking?
- (3) would the most desirable qualities for the teacher, as perceived by the students, concur with the cultural expectations regarding the teacher’s role as describe in the literature cited above? In other words, do Asian students view their relationship with the teacher from a pragmatic “business-like” perspective only?

To support a notion that culture is a multifaceted phenomenon, the present study would like to draw attention to the concept of “small culture” proposed by Holliday (1999). In opposition to the “large culture” paradigm which embraces “ethnic” or “national” culture and within which a country’s educational system is habitually placed (Biggs, 1998), the “small culture” paradigm attaches ‘culture’ to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour” (Holliday, 1999, p.237). Importantly, Holliday suggests that a “small culture” can exist only temporarily and last over the duration of that particular social group’s interaction. This is a very interesting consideration that could be employed in language teaching practice. Teacher-student interaction in the language classroom – and in any other type of classroom – could be viewed within the “small culture” paradigm as proposed by Holliday (1999) where the instructor and the students form their own unique “culture of teaching” and “culture of learning”. The concept of the “small culture” appears particularly useful for the current research as it presents an opportunity to construct a teacher-student interpersonal relationship style which is unique and suits each particular group of learners.

Conceptualization of Relationship Styles in Social Psychology

To examine teacher-student interaction, this study uses a model of interpersonal relationship based on the studies in the field of social psychology. Sternberg (1986) who developed the “triangular theory of love” proposed that a tripartite structure could be suitable to describe human relationship.ⁱⁱ

Hammer (2005) suggested that Sternberg's tripartite structure could be modified to suit the classroom context and be used to assess the teaching style according to the following three dimensions: "interpersonal (affective) – presentation (behavioural) – knowledge (cognitive)". As the current study focuses on the teacher-student interaction – and not on the teaching style -- we suggest the following three dimensions along which one could view interpersonal relationship between the teacher and his or her students: projected image (affective) – rapport with students (behavioural) – knowledge transfer (cognitive).

Proposition 1: Considering that the classroom climate in the Asian context has been described as hierarchical, exam-driven, result-oriented, and placing a great importance on the teacher's authority while not being concerned with the students' emotional needs, the current study hypothesizes that in the teacher-student interpersonal relationship in the Asian context the "affective" dimension would not be prominent. On the other hand, the most prominent dimension would be the "cognitive" dimension.

Research on Desirable Qualities in Others

As the second part of the current study focuses on the students' opinions regarding the most and the least desirable for the language teacher qualities and their hierarchy, a relevant research on this topic in the field of psychology needs to be mentioned.

Research on desirable personal characteristics is a well-established area in social psychology. A seminal study by Anderson (1968) assessed normative likableness rating for 555 adjectives related to personal traits. Top ten most likable qualities had been – in descending order -- "sincere", "honest", "understanding", "loyal", "truthful", "trustworthy", "intelligent", "dependable", "open-minded", and "thoughtful". As Anderson's study revealed, there exists the importance hierarchy within the set of the most preferred qualities.

Further studies indicated that people would exercise different preferences for personal qualities in others in different types of social landscapes. As Cottrell, Neuberg and Li (2007) noted, people valued personal characteristics in others "as they were relevant to the specific nature of interdependent group or relationship" (p. 208). In other words, the sets of most desirable qualities and the hierarchy of these qualities will differ depending on the nature and type of social interaction, as well as on the socio-cultural context. Therefore, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the image of a "good teacher" as perceived by the learners coming from different cultural backgrounds would vary.

Proposition 2: Asian learners are more likely to value those qualities in a teacher that are related to the teacher's good professional performance rather than to his or her ability to

establish the emotional attachment and a good rapport with the students.

Studies on Teacher's Desirable Qualities

Some studies reported that the most desirable qualities assigned to teachers by their students were relationship-oriented. Buskist et al.'s (2002) study on students' perceptions on what qualities do "master" teachers possess produced a list of 28 traits. Such qualities as knowledgeable, well-organized, hardworking were all featured in the list. However, it is interesting to note that more than half qualities in the list were interpersonal in nature. Furthermore, the five most valued characteristics were: understanding, personable, respectful, happy, and caring.

Pozo-Muños et al.'s (2000) study employed the Semantic Differential (SD) technique to assess Spanish university students' opinions about their lecturers and to discern the qualities assigned to the "ideal teacher". The results indicated that the students placed high value on the qualities directly related to the teacher's professional competency (e.g., expresses himself/herself clearly, informed, and competent), and also to the ability to establish good rapport with the students (e.g., able to listen, accessible, sociable, and able to motivate).

Studies on Language Teacher's Characteristics

Studies that focus on language teacher's characteristics have been scarce. Girard's research (as cited in Borg, 2006) among the language learners identified the following seven desirable qualities for the language teacher: conducts interesting classes, emphasizes good pronunciation, gives clear explanation, has a good knowledge of the target language, has no favouritism, tries to involve the students into the classroom activities, and is patient. Prodromou (as cited in Borg, 2006) presented the following list of the desirable qualities for the language teacher: friendly, prepares good notes, can tell jokes, plays games with the students, treats the weak learners well, and acts like a comedian.

In a study by Brosh (as cited in Borg, 2006) the following traits of a good language teacher were listed: a good knowledge of the target language, clear explanation and good organization of the classroom activities, ability to motivate the students and to stimulate their interest in the subject, fairness, and being approachable. In Borg's (2006) study, Hungarian pre-service English language teachers identified the following particular traits of the language teacher: creative, has sense of humor, flexible, sometimes behaves as an 'actor', motivating, enthusiastic, is able to communicate freely, and has positive attitude. Among the least desirable qualities mentioned by the participants in Borg's study were: strictness, the

teacher's formal and impersonal attitude towards the students. As these studies show, prominent traits of the language teachers included good subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and interpersonal communication style.

Some studies on teacher-student interaction have been done in the Asian context or have focused on the Asian language learners. A study by Park (2006) reported that undergraduate students majoring in English in Korea valued teachers' personal and relationship-oriented qualities (e.g., "friendly, impartial, caring, understanding, patient") higher than their teaching ability (p. 122). A study by Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004) compared perceptions of language learners coming from the same educational background (Japan) but studying in different educational context (USA and Japan). This study is especially interesting as it examined the tenacity of the previous educational setting's "learning culture".

As Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth's study reported, both cohorts of the Japanese learners valued teachers who were open-minded, sensitive to the cultural differences, available for consultations after the classes, could create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, could admit his or her own mistakes, and were able to organize classroom activities according to their students' needs. Regarding the unfavourable teacher behaviour, the differences between the two cohorts were quite prominent. Thus, for the Japanese students in the USA, treating the students unequally, getting temperamental and moody, lacking creativity in lesson plans topped the list of negative characteristics. For the students in Japan, being uncreative, lacking knowledge of or respect for other cultures and lacking knowledge about society outside the school were the most undesirable traits of the language teacher. As the study showed, cultural milieu does influence the learners' perceptions of the teacher-student classroom interaction. Thus, language learners would modify their views regarding relationship with their teacher after they had spent some time in a different learning culture.

Semantic Differential Technique and Gardner's Instrument

Instrument employed in the current study is a part of Gardner's "The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery" (Gardner, 1985); it uses the SD technique and contains 25 scales with a seven-point continuum ranging from strongly positive to strongly negative reaction, and the middle of the scale representing a neutral opinion.

The SD technique was introduced by American psychologist Charles Osgood and his colleagues in the 1950s. Osgood et al. (1957) suggested that the semantic differential scales could be used to measure the attitude of different people or groups of people toward a phenomenon, idea, person, or a concept. Analysis of the data obtained from semantic

differential scales is often done through factor analysis. Ratings on bipolar dimensions of the semantic scales tend to be correlated and yield a structure consisting of three basic dimensions, i.e., Evaluation, Potency and Activity (EPA) (Heise, 1970; Osgood, 1964).

Gardner proposed to view language learners' attitudes towards their language teacher from four dimensions, i.e., (1) General evaluative reaction, (2) Rapport, (3) Competence, and (4) Inspiration. This layout is different from a more commonly accepted tripartite EPA structure, and Gardner (1985) did not provide a rationale for the division of the items into these four categories. However, he suggested that changes in research setting, the target language or the educational context might necessitate changes to the instrument. In the current research, we retained the adjectives selected by Gardner. However, we re-organized the items of the instrument into three categories to reflect the tripartite structure of the teacher-student relationship as proposed by the current authors, and which is based on Hammer's (2005) model.

Research Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 100 (n=100) students who learned the Russian language at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The classes were taught by a native speaker of Russian. All the participants were Malaysians. Of them, 69 (or 69%) were first year students, and 31 (31%) were second year students. The majority of the respondents (n=67, or 67%) were science students. There were more females (n=55, or 55%) than males (n=45, or 45%); the respondents' age ranged from 19 to 25 years old.

By ethnic background, the majority of the students were Chinese (n=48, 48%), followed by Malays (n=17, or 17%), Indians (n=8, or 8%), Kadazans (n=5, or 5%), Dusuns (n=5, or 5%), and other ethnic groups (n=17, or 17%), such as Bajau, Sino-Kadazan, Lumbawang, etc.

All the participants have had an extensive language learning experience in both formal and informal settings. They were proficient speakers of the English language as they had successfully passed the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) and obtained either Band 4, 5, or 6 of the test, which enabled them to register for foreign language course at the university. Eleven percent of the respondents (n=11) listed the English language as the language of communication at home while twenty percent (n=20) stated that they spoke English with their friends. Thirty-six percent of the respondents (n=36) mentioned a study of an additional language (e.g., Mandarin, Tamil) at secondary school; thirty percent (n=30) of the students reported a study of one or more local languages/dialects in informal settings,

such as from friends or within their families.

Instrument

The scales and the seven-point continuum of Gardner's instrument were retained in this study. However, some modifications were done to the original instrument. First of all, the title was changed from "My French Teacher" to "My Secondary School English Language Teacher" to reflect the context of the present inquiry. Secondly, a section on the respondents' demographic profile (e.g., age, gender, ethnic group, university major, etc.) was placed before the scales. Thirdly, to reflect the tripartite structure of the teacher-student relationship, the adjectives were re-organized into three themes or groups. The themes and the adjectives they contain are as follows:

projected image (affective)

colourless/colourful, dull/exciting, tedious/fascinating, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, cheerless/cheerful, unapproachable/approachable, unintelligent/intelligent

rapport with students (behavioural)

unfriendly/friendly, inconsiderate/considerate, unreliable/reliable, impolite/polite, insincere/sincere, undependable/dependable, suspicious/trusting, insensitive/sensitive, impatient/patient, uninterested/interested

knowledge transfer (cognitive)

inefficient/efficient, disorganized/organized, unindustrious/industrious, incapable/capable, and incompetent/competent, boring/interesting, unimaginative/imaginative

When separating the adjectives into the themes we considered the degree of involvement and the kind of interaction that would be necessary for the students to form an opinion about each particular personal characteristic. For example, the items placed in the projected image (affective) theme may require only a brief interaction with a person to determine whether the person has or has not the specified characteristic. In other words, a short encounter would allow to form an opinion whether the teacher is pleasant or unpleasant, approachable or unapproachable. On the other hand, a greater degree of interaction and proximity would be required to form an opinion about the personal qualities grouped into the rapport with students (behavioural) theme. Finally, interaction within the teaching/learning context would

be required to form an opinion whether the teacher possesses qualities listed in the knowledge transfer (cognitive) theme.

The second part of the instrument employed in this research contained two open-ended questions: (1) “What characteristics and personality, in your opinion, an ideal language teacher should have?”, and (2) “Can you describe the most undesirable characteristics of a language teacher?”.

Data Collection

The research was carried out in the academic year 2006/2007. The questionnaires written in English were distributed among the students and were answered in class. A brief explanation and a short practice of how to mark the semantic differential scales were given as outlined by Gardner (1985). The forms were collected upon completion.

Data Analysis and Empirical Findings

a. Results of the factor analysis

Factor analysis was carried out to identify the underlying structure or dimensions along which the students perceived their relationship with the language teacher. Factor analysis can help to determine which items of a research instrument cluster together to construct a component or dimension. While researchers use their own intuition or reasoning to classify the items into several groups, factor analysis confirms or rejects these classifications through statistical methods. In short, factor analysis is used to confirm the appropriateness of the items for each dimension of the conceptual framework.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy test and Barlett’s test of sphericity were done in our study in order to allow for the application of factor analysis. Results of the tests support the applicability of the factor analysis for this study. Thus, the KMO sampling adequacy test statistic is 0.856 which is higher than the threshold value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 1998); the Barlett’s test of sphericity statistic is significant at 0.01 level.

The factor analysis identified three (3) components which had eigenvalue greater than the benchmark value.ⁱⁱⁱ These components explain 58.14 percent of total variance among the 25 items in Gardner’s instrument.

Table 1 reports the result of rotated component matrix. The main purpose of rotation is to reduce the number of the components on which items have a higher factor loading. Rotation is expected to reduce the number of variables and produce a clear structure for the interpretation of results. Some variables kept retaining dual or triple high loading after

rotation, which maintained complex structures. These complex structures could pose difficulty in interpretation of results. Therefore, eight items (#3, #5, #6, #10, #14, #20, #24, and #25) were eliminated due to a higher factor loading on more than one component.^{iv} Another two items had to be removed from the analysis due to a low communality (#19 and #23).^v

Table 1

Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Components			
	1	2	3	4
Interesting (#22)	0.817			
Colourful (#18)	0.761			
Exciting (#12)	0.732			
Imaginative (#15)	0.645			
Trusting (#8)	0.506			
Efficient (#1)		0.744		
Competent (#4)		0.728		
Organised (#13)		0.693		
Industrious (#21)		0.637		
Capable (#9)		0.574		
Polite (#17)			0.788	
Friendly (#11)			0.673	
Pleasant (#7)			0.668	
Patient (#16)			0.664	
Sensitive (#2)				0.847
Cronbach alpha	0.833	0.803	0.791	

Each of the components was further checked for reliability (Cronbach alpha). The internal consistency reliability for the factors was: Factor 1 -- .833, Factor 2 -- .803, and factor 3 -- .791 (see Table 1). This shows that there is no bias among the items within each component.

As Table 1 reports, three components identified by the factor analysis and the items they contain are as follows:

Component 1: Projected image (Affective). It includes such items to describe the language teacher as “interesting” (#22), “colourful” (#18), “exciting” (#12), “imaginative” (#15), and “trusting” (#8). As this result shows, only two items that were originally placed by us into this theme were retained by the factor analysis (i.e., items #18 and #12). Other items that formed Component 1 crossed their boundaries; thus, the items “interesting” (#22) and “imaginative” (#15) had been placed by us into the “knowledge transfer” theme, while “trusting” (#8) had been posited as a part of the “rapport with students” dimension.

Component 2: Knowledge transfer (Cognitive). It consists of the adjectives “efficient” (#1), “competent” (#4), “organised (#13)”, “industrious” (#21), and “capable” (#9). All the items retained within this component were placed by us into this group. In other words, no items in Component 2 crossed their border to form this dimension during the factor analysis. This means that among the three components, Component 2 is the most consistent.

Component 3: Rapport with students (Behavioural). It contains the items “polite” (#17), “friendly” (#11), “pleasant” (#7), and “patient” (#16). Among them, only one item (#7) crossed its boundary to become a part of this component. The rest of the adjectives that had been tentatively placed by us into this theme were retained in the course of the factor analysis. This means that the items “polite”, “friendly”, and “patient” were recognized by the students as related to one and the same dimension in the teacher-student interaction.

b. Results of the qualitative analysis

The instrument employed in this study contained two open-ended questions: (1) “What characteristics and personality, in your opinion, an ideal language teacher should have?”, and (2) “Can you describe the most undesirable characteristics of a language teacher?”. The students were asked to provide at least three characteristics for each of the questions. Fifty-six traits were initially listed as the most desirable teacher’s qualities; fifty-nine traits described the teacher’s most unfavourable behaviour.

After the initial lists had been compiled and analyzed, semantically close qualities were combined together (e.g., approachable – good rapport; reliable – dependable; boring – dull – tedious) and the total number of responses for each group of synonyms were counted. As a result, the list of the desirable qualities contained 31 items while the list of the least desirable traits included 24 items (see Appendix). In the lists, the majority of adjectives related to the teachers’ personal qualities (e.g., friendly, cheerful, sincere) rather than their professional

qualities (e.g., teaching skills, organized, gives homework).

Table 2

Ten most desirable qualities of the language teacher (student n=100)

No	Positive qualities	Times mentioned
1	caring/empathetic	67
2	patient	54
3	friendly	51
4	interesting	41
5	good teaching skills/ability	29
6	cheerful	22
7	creative	20
8	polite	18
9	sincere	15
10	organized	14

As reported in Table 2, top ten most desirable qualities of the language teacher were: caring/empathetic (n=67), patient (n=54), friendly (n=51), interesting (n=41), has good teaching skills (n=29), cheerful (n=22), creative (n=20), polite (n=18), sincere (n=15), and organized (n=14). As the list revealed, the teacher's interpersonal skills were the most highly valued qualities, and such virtues as caring, patient, and friendly were each mentioned by more than half of the students. The language teacher's professional capacity (i.e., ability to prepare interesting classes and having good teaching skills/ability) occupied the fourth and fifth place in the list.

Next, as Table 3 shows, top ten least desirable characteristics of the language teachers were boring (n=60), inconsiderate (n=28), lacking professional skills (n=28), unfriendly (n=24), emotional (n=24), impolite (n=24), angry (n=19), disorganized/unprofessional (n=18), too strict (n=14), and has bad rapport with the students (n=12).

Table 3

Ten Least Desirable Qualities of the Language Teacher (student n=100)

No	Negative qualities	Times mentioned
1	boring	60
2	inconsiderate	28
3	lacks professional skills	28
4	unfriendly	24
5	emotional	24
6	impolite	24
7	angry	19
8	disorganized	18
9	too strict	14
10	bad rapport with the students	12

Interestingly, the teacher's professional skills – or the lack of thereof -- featured quite prominently in the list. Thus, being “boring” (n=60) and lacking professional skills (n=28) were among top three least favourable teacher's qualities.^{vi} Regarding the personal qualities, the least favoured traits were related to the inability to establish a good communication with the students (e.g., inconsiderate, unfriendly, impolite, has bad rapport with students) followed by the teacher's emotional shortcomings (e.g., emotional and angry).

Discussion and Conclusion

Results of the factor analysis done in this study confirmed the existence of basic dimensions in the teacher-student relationship, which lends support to Pozo-Muñoz et al.'s (2000) findings. Three dimensions in the teacher-student interaction were clearly identified in the current study. Therefore, the idea that teacher-student relationship has a tripartite structure, which includes such dimensions as projected image (affective) – rapport with students (behavioural) – knowledge transfer (cognitive) could be accepted. This means that the structure of the teacher-student classroom interaction as identified in the current study is similar to the interpretations of interpersonal relationships developed in the field of psychology (Hammer, 2005; Sternberg, 1986).

Among the three dimension identified by the factor analysis, the cognitive dimension was the most cohesive; it contained only the adjectives that we had tentatively allocated into this theme. In other words, no adjectives retained in this component had crossed border to become a part of the dimension. This finding supports Proposition 1 of the current study that the cognitive dimension in the teacher-student relationship would be the most prominent.

Other two dimensions— affective and behavioural – contained the adjectives that had crossed their borders in the course of the factor analysis. The affective dimension was the least cohesive of the two dimensions; out of the five adjectives retained by the factor analysis only two had been originally placed by us into this theme, and three adjectives had crossed their borders. This finding supports Proposition 1 that the projected image (affective) dimension in the teacher-student interaction would not be prominent.

Regarding the second aim of the current study, which was to examine the most and the least desirable qualities that the students assigned to the language teacher, and the hierarchy of these qualities, the analysis of the open-ended questions revealed similarities between the findings of this research and the previous studies. Among top ten positive and negative qualities of the language teacher reported here, some were listed in other research studies (see Table 4 and Table 5).

Table 4: *Comparison of the Positive Characteristics of the Language Teacher*

The current study	Previous studies
caring	Park (2006)
patient	Girard (1977); Park (2006); Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)
interesting	Girard (1977)
friendly	Prodromou (1991); Park (2006); Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)
good teaching skills	Brosh (1996)
creative	Borg (2006)
sincere	Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)

The majority of the participants (n=67) in our study mentioned that being caring/empathetic was the most important quality of the language teacher, which is similar to

the responses given by the participants in Park’s (2006) research. Certainly, being “caring” can refer both to the academic and the personal aspects in the teacher-student relationship; the teacher may care about the students’ emotional wellbeing as well as about their academic progress. However, the finding that emotional involvement was the most desirable quality is quite important as it shows that in the Asian educational context the students do appreciate and place high value on the personal qualities of their teachers. This result supports the findings of other studies done in the Asian educational context. For example, such traits as patient and friendly were reported important for the teacher in studies by Park (2006) and Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004); being sincere was highly valued by the participants in Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth’s (2004) research.

This finding refutes the current study’s Proposition 2 that posited that Asian learners are more likely to value the professional qualities of their teacher rather than his or her ability to establish emotional attachment with the students. This means that good interpersonal skills identified in Buskist et al.’s (2002) study are universal qualities of a good teacher, which occupy a high position within the hierarchy of teacher’s personal traits regardless the socio-cultural or educational context. Another interesting finding of the current study was that having good “language skills”, i.e. a characteristic that is pertinent specifically to the language teacher was mentioned by six respondents only and was ranked as the fifteenth most desirable quality (see Appendix).

Regarding the least desirable qualities, three among top ten such traits as identified by the participants in our study were reported in the previous research studies (see Table 5).

Table 5

Comparison of the Negative Characteristics of the Language Teacher

The current study	Previous studies
temperamental/angry	Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)
too strict	Borg (2006); Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)
impolite / has no respect for the students	Saito & Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004)

As the table shows, being temperamental, too strict, impolite were reported as the least desirable qualities by Japanese students in Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth’s (2004) research as well as in our study. A teacher who is too strict was not favoured by the participants in

Borg's (2006) study.

In the current study, the lack of good professional skills was high on the list (see Table 3). Thus, being “boring” was the most undesirable quality of all, and was mentioned 60 times; “lack of professional skills” occupied the third place in the hierarchy and was mentioned 28 times. However, seven out of top ten negative characteristics were relationship-oriented (i.e., inconsiderate, unfriendly, emotional, impolite, angry, too strict, and has bad rapport with the students). This means that the teacher's personal characteristics were very important to the respondents as they were mentioned more often (n=145) compared to the teacher's professional capacities (n=106). Therefore, we suggest that bad personal qualities and poor interpersonal skills are among the least desirable qualities that the language educator could possess. Apparently, the worst characteristics of the language teacher are, just like the best ones, relationship oriented.

Regarding the third aim of the current research and Proposition 2 that learners in the Asian educational context do not prioritize the emotional aspect in their relationship with the teacher, the findings do not support such a notion. The results of the current study negate the perception that Asian learners are comfortable with having an authoritarian and emotionally distant figure for the language teacher. The finding that 67 out of 100 students mentioned that being caring and empathetic was the most desirable trait of the language teacher shows that the students, in fact, need the teacher's emotional support and involvement. This result offers an interesting insight into the learner's psychology, i.e., there may exist a gap between how the students perceive the relationship with their language teachers and how they want this relationship be. Learners' perceptions of the relationship, which are based on their previous learning experiences, may comply with the socio-cultural attitudes prevailing within society. However, their emotional needs are universal rather than culture-specific.

There are some limitations to this study. First of all, the participants were all from the same university and the same language program. Therefore, the findings may not be automatically applicable to a wider population of language learners. Secondly, the students who participated in this study were successful language learners as they obtained good results in the MUET and were eligible to register for a foreign language program at the university. For future research, it would be interesting to explore dimensions in teacher-student relationship focusing on less successful language learners. Also, examining the hierarchy that these students assign to the teacher's most and least desirable qualities could offer an additional insight.

Future studies may want to introduce some modifications to Gardner's instrument, or even

develop their own scales. Based on the current inquiry findings, some additional scales could be created in order to explore the dimensions of teacher-student interaction in a greater depth. Especially, in view that the “sensitive” item had a high loading (0.847) but was not a part of any dimension, other semantically close to the adjective items (e.g., “understanding”, “perceptive”, “sympathetic”) could be considered for inclusion in the instrument.

To conclude, the results of the qualitative analysis done in this study indicate that “culture” does not override the students’ preferences regarding the patterns of the teacher-student interaction and the teacher’s characteristic. This fact highlights a reality that though some aspects of teacher-student classroom interaction can be – and will be -- culture-specific, certain perceptions are universally held and shared by students in different educational settings.

The findings of the current study also encourage a closer look at the notion of a “small culture” in the language classroom as suggested by Holliday (1999) and how this idea could be incorporated into language pedagogy. Language educators may consider a possibility of developing and promoting a “small culture” with each particular group of learners. There may be no ready-made solution as to how precisely this “small” culture should be cultivated within the classroom. A fact that group dynamics and the teacher-student interactional patterns are unique and peculiar to each particular cohort of learners is something that all educators are aware of. Classroom atmosphere is never the same with different cohorts of learners. This means that development of the “small culture” could be a trial and error process which is based on the teacher’s intuition, experience, value system, and the knowledge of his or her students. Learners’ age, gender, university major, educational, ethnic and family backgrounds will all play the role in the formation of the “small” culture. For a teacher that has educational background that is different from his or her learners’ (e.g., expatriate teacher and native learners, or native teacher and foreign students) the notion of “small” culture could be especially useful and conducive for developing and practicing efficacious and enhanced language pedagogy.

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Appendix

Most and Least Desirable Qualities of the Language Teacher

No	Desirable qualities	Times mentioned	No	Least desirable qualities	Times mentioned
1	caring/empathetic	67	1	boring	60
2	patient	54	2	inconsiderate	28
3	friendly	51	3	lacks professional skills	28
4	interesting	41	4	unfriendly	24
5	has teaching skills/ability	29	5	emotional	24
6	cheerful	22	6	impolite	24
7	creative	20	7	angry	19
8	polite	18	8	disorganized	18
9	sincere	15	9	too strict	14

10	organized	14	10	bad rapport	12
11	confident	14	11	passive	9
12	fun/exciting	13	12	lacks sense of humour	8
13	intelligent	13	13	unpleasant/mean	6
14	approachable	7	14	favouritism/unfair	6
15	language skills	6	15	insincere	5
16	pleasant	6	16	unintelligent	5
17	responsible	6	17	suspicious	4
18	imaginative	5	18	cheerless	4
19	humorous	4	19	lacks language skills	4
20	active	3	20	too critical	3
21	open-minded	3	21	undependable	2
22	hardworking	3	22	tense	2
23	fair	3	23	inflexible	2
24	good appearance	3	24	uninterested	1
25	passionate	2			
26	trusting	2			
27	smart/cool	2			
28	gives homework	1			
29	versatile	1			
30	authoritative	1			
31	colourful	1			

Endnotes

ⁱAccording to Hofstede and Hofstede (2004) classification, countries with a high PD acceptance are, for the most part, located in Latin America and Asia, while countries with a low PD acceptance are located predominantly in North America and Western Europe.

ⁱⁱFor example, Sternberg (1986) suggested that intimacy, passion and commitment were the three “building blocks” that constitute the romantic relationship. Intimacy was described as the “feelings of closeness, connectedness”, passion as “the drive that leads to romance”, and commitment as “the decision that one loves someone else and ... the commitment to maintain that love” (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119).

ⁱⁱⁱTo form a dimension each component must contain from three to six items (Tabachnik & Fidel, 2001). Therefore, Component 4 in this study cannot be considered a dimension.

^{iv}In this study, loadings 0.5 and above loading are considered as higher loadings.

^vOnly communalities of 0.5 or more are considered high in the current study; communalities below this figure are considered low communalities.

^{vi}Considering the context, being “boring” obviously does not refer to the teacher’s personal traits as much as to his or her inability to make the classes interesting for the learners.

Analysis of Communication Strategies used by Freshman Active English Students using YackPack for Homework-based Speaking Tasks

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Bio Data:

Andrew Meyerhoff has BA and TESOL training from the University of British Columbia, and an M. Ed. in Curriculum Studies from Acadia University. Mr. Meyerhoff has been teaching ESL and EFL for over 20 years. He started in Canada, teaching immigrant students for a local school board, but has spent most of the past two decades in Japan where he has taught mainly in schools and universities. He is presently an assistant professor at Saga University in Kyushu, Japan. His research interests include curriculum development, social constructivist learning, and integrating technology into the curriculum.

Abstract

This paper analyzes the progress of Active English (AE) students' speaking at Saga University over a five-week period in Fall 2007. The researcher was interested in both quantity (speech rate, lexical density, etc.) and quality (lexical and grammatical accuracy) of speech, as well as the implementation of communication strategies. He, also, looked at speech differences between apparent planned and unplanned speech acts. He concludes that further studies be conducted to look at the roles of teacher and student feedback and motivation on speaking fluency and accuracy, challenging current assumptions, as well as the extent to which individual task questions impact on students' speaking performance. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he calls for further research to analyze the roles of planned and unplanned speech on EFL language development, especially in regards to *functional planning* which has been under investigated to date.

Keywords: Communication strategies, oral fluency, accuracy, lexical density/complexity, procedural/ declarative knowledge

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem

As part of evaluation for AE students' marks at Saga University, the native English language instructors administer a pre- and post-test to see how much students have improved over the course of the semester. The test is comprised of four sections: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As the test is the same for all five teachers who teach the AE classes, in spite of the fact that they use different textbooks with different materials, teach three different levels, and have varying teaching styles, it could hardly be expected that the test is actually measuring

what they cover in the classroom. Still, it is necessary to measure the progress of the program as a whole.

Therefore, partly to compensate for the gap between test content and class content, and partly to ensure that the researcher covered all four skills in his assessment, he allotted students weekly writing and speaking assignments to be completed as homework.

The writing assignments were sent to the teacher via email, and the teacher provided written feedback noting errors and points to be corrected. The speaking assignments were done on YackPack, an internet-based social network in which students could send sound files to other members in the pack, or class (Meyerhoff, 2006). In the case at hand, files were submitted to the instructor only.

Although feedback was not provided to students, the instructor monitored students' speaking over the course of the semester and used this as an assessment tool to ascertain whether progress was made. Yet, the question remains: how does one measure progress? Should it be measured through more accurate language use? Should it be measured through more fluent-like speaking? Should it be measured through more complex word usage or sentence structure? Or, should it be measuring how well students can express themselves and negotiate meaning in unplanned spontaneous situations? Perhaps the answer lies in some combination of all of the above.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The present study was done to see how students' speaking progressed over the five weeks of assessment, and to determine what strategies were used and improved upon in their speaking.

2. Literature Review

Early developments in communication strategies began in the early 1970s. The concept that learners of a second language devise a unique language system that lies between, but distinct from both their native and target languages, was first named *approximate system* (Nemser 1971). A year later the commonly known name *interlanguage* (IL) was adopted (Selinker 1972). Varadi soon after suggested Communication Strategies (CSs) are used to compensate for breakdowns in communication (Varadi, 1973).

Clearly linked to CSs is communicative competence, encompassing expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning, both psycholinguistic and socio-cultural (Savignon, 1972). Canale and Swain were the first to note that CSs are integral to communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). According to these two scholars,

communicative competence is comprised of four sub-categories: 1.) grammatical competence which governs words and rules; 2.) socio-linguistic competence which governs appropriateness; 3.) discourse competence which governs cohesion and coherence; 4.) and strategic competence which governs the appropriate use of communication strategies.

Around the same time, various scholars began constructing taxonomies of competence (Tarone, 1977), (Faerch and Kasper, 1983), (Bialystok, 1983), (Poulisse, 1989; 1990). Without going into detail, some of the strategies mentioned in these taxonomies have included avoidance (topic avoidance, or message abandonment), approximation (using a word close in meaning), paraphrasing, word coining, transferring (literal translation), circumlocution (describing a word instead of saying the word when it is either unknown or not easily retrieved), appealing for assistance, miming, code-switching, substitution, generalization, exemplification, restructuring, repairing, formal reductions (phonological, morphological, and grammatical), functional reductions (action, proposition, mode), and compensatory strategies, which include holistic, analytic, holistic and analytic combined, and, previously-mentioned, transfer. The various taxonomies, so far, have all been useful, and represent an evolutionary process in language research.

Of interest, these strategies show a commonality with Oxford's six categories of learning strategies: memorization, cognitive, compensation, metacognition, affective, and social (Oxford, 1990); therefore, language learning strategies, in general, would appear to be an extension on the earlier CSs. In fact, Oxford mentions three affective strategies that impact on attitudes, motivation, and emotions: anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and emotion monitoring (Oxford, 1990).

As can be seen, affective strategies are closely connected to motivation in foreign language acquisition. Ryan and Deci categorize motivation into extrinsic motivation, which is based on outcome, and intrinsic motivation, which is based on interest and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 1985). It is suggested that students with high intrinsic motivation learn best.

Intrinsic motivation ties in nicely with the affective-filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1981): students who feel less anxiety, yet stimulated and not bored, will be more motivated to learn. According to Krashen, as well as Ryan and Deci, teachers should create an environment that is enjoyable, interesting, and low in anxiety. Further, in Krashen's view, focus on meaning should take precedence over focus on grammar, although grammar should not be ruled out altogether. If students focus on meaning and fluency, grammatical and lexical accuracy can, accordingly, be fine tuned over time.

In contrast to Krashen, other linguists assert that too much focus on fluency, and not

enough attention to accuracy, will lead to poor grammatical development (Skehan, 1998) (Brown, 2001). Although the accuracy versus fluency debate has been ongoing for sometime, most language experts believe that both are important, and one should not negate the other (Brumfit, 1984), (Ellis, 2003), (Foster & Skehan, 1999).

In fact, it has been suggested that fluency, complexity, and accuracy are three primary components competing for the learner's attention (Skehan & Foster, 1999), which often involve trade-offs. Skehan and Foster (1999) defined the three terms as follows:

- fluency the capacity to use language in real time, to emphasize meanings, possibly draw more lexicalized systems
- accuracy the ability to avoid error in performance, possibly reflecting higher levels of control in the language, as well as a conservative orientation, that is, avoidance of challenging structures that might provoke error
- complexity/range the capacity to use more advanced language, with the possibility that such language may not be controlled so effectively. This may also involve a greater willingness to take risks, and use fewer controlled language subsystems. This area is also taken to correlate with a greater likelihood of restructuring, that is, change and development in the interlanguage system (p. 96)

Also, task structure and cognitive load are suggested to have a role on a speaker's response (ibid., p. 93). Cognitive load is the load on working memory, and it is suggested that this be kept low in order to aid long-term memory (Sweller, 1988). Task structures can be broken into three groups: personal tasks, using information familiar to speakers, reducing cognitive load; narratives, which require sufficient organization skills; and decision-making tasks, which are more interactive (Skehan & Foster, 1999). Regardless of the type of task, Skehan

(1995) has argued that planning time reduces cognitive load. However, Ochs (1979) has indicated that speakers who do not make use of planning time overly-rely on early stage morphosyntactic structures, whether they know the structures or not.

Further, many researchers have looked at the differences between planned and unplanned speech acts. Some researchers have indicated that pre-task planning impacts positively on fluency and complexity, but has a limited effect on accuracy (Crookes, 1989), (Ellis, 1987), (Ortega, 1995), but others have shown favorable gains in all three areas (Foster and Skehan, 1996), (Wigglesworth, 1997), (Menhert, 1998). Perhaps there could be other factors accounting for these discrepancies such as learner profile, type of instruction, and even learning environment, for example, ESL versus EFL.

Then, there is the perplexing question: What is fluency? One definition is the abilities to talk at length without awkward pauses, talk coherently, use semantically dense sentences, have appropriate things to say in various contexts, and be creative with the language (Fillmore, 1979). As far back as the mid-1970s, *automaticity*, the ability to retrieve language forms with ease, and conversation speed have been suggested as important in gauging fluency (Harmann & Stork, 1976). Others have also suggested that continuity and speed, as well as naturalness of language are important measures of fluency (Brumfit, 1984). In the 1990s, the vital role of *automaticity* was revived and brought back to the forefront (Schmidt, 1992). Unfortunately, automaticity cannot be realistically expected from low-level L2 speakers. Faerch & Kasper (1986) have broken speech into two stages: the planning stage, and the execution stage. Previous research has suggested for L1 speakers planning and execution are carried out simultaneously on a subconscious level (Faerch & Kasper, 1986), but low level L2 speakers cannot yet handle the cognitive strain of unplanned speech (Crookes, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996), and need a clearer delineation of these two stages.

On another point, it has been indicated that in order to be a fluent speaker one must transcend beyond a declarative stage, knowing about the language and its rules, to a procedural stage, knowing how to use the language creatively and effortlessly in various contexts (Schmidt, 1992). In fact, it may be said that there are three stages of language acquisition: cognitive, associative, and autonomous (Anderson, 1983; 1995). The cognitive stage is the same as the declarative stage, and the autonomous stage is the same as the procedural stage. The associative stage is a linking stage between the other two, and it is at this point that risks are taken, errors are gradually corrected, and language is slowly refined. The key point is that procedural knowledge is acquired gradually, and learning cannot take place without experimentation and the application of CSs (O'Malley, Chamot, & Walker,

1987). Thus, errors are a necessary step in the learning process. With this in mind, the researcher argues that automaticity can be fostered over time, and should not be imposed too rigidly early in the acquisition process. Without any planning stage at all, speakers will feel cognitive strain and not be able to practice higher syntactical structures. Planning time, therefore, should gradually be reduced as learners slowly integrate the planning and execution stage, although this will take considerable time, if it happens at all.

In one famous study conducted on Japanese learners of English (Crookes, 1989), two groups of students were studied: those who were asked to provide unplanned speech, and those who were required to give speech after ten minutes planning time. Ten minutes could be considered an adequate compromise, in which students clearly had a planning and execution stage, but were simply not reading scripts. In fact, Crookes allowed his students to make notes in the planning stage, but took away the notes for the actual execution stage. As a result, Crookes discovered that complexity increased with planning time, although planning time had little impact on accuracy. Correspondingly, complexity could be considered a better measure of speech than accuracy.

Still, there were major differences between Crookes' subjects, and the subjects of the present study: Crookes' subjects were older (between mid-20s and mid-40s) compared to 18 and 19 years of age in the present study, Crookes' subjects were of a higher proficiency level (TOEFL scores between 430 and 650) compared to TOEFL scores between 180 and 230 for the present study, and Crookes' subjects were studying in an ESL environment whereas subjects in this study were in an EFL environment. On the other hand, all subjects in both studies were Japanese; thus, they would likely demonstrate similar linguistic and cultural traits.

The researcher of the present study was additionally concerned with what O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzarez, Kupper, and Rosso (1985) termed *functional planning* (FP) which involves the learner analyzing the task, and learning new language to fit that task. Although Crookes briefly mentions FP, he did not incorporate this point into his study.

FP ties in nicely with the concept of *mediational means* (Wertsch, 1993; 1997). Mediation means are tools that help define human processes, both socially and individually, as well as aid in the construction of knowledge (Murphey, 2003). By depriving learners of mediational means in the planning stage, language educators are hindering learners from scaffolding their language skills.

It is within this framework that the researcher wishes to probe.

3. Research Questions

In this study, the following questions will be addressed:

- *How do students' speech rates change over the course of study?*
- *How do grammatical and lexical accuracy, combined, change over the course of study?*
- *What CSs do students apply at different stages of the study?*
- *How does vocabulary change over the period of study? (Do students use more advanced and/or academic vocabulary?)*
- *How does lexical density, as well as lexical complexity, change on individual tasks?*
- *How may question-type play a role in how students respond?*
- *What distinguishing factors can be found in apparent planned and unplanned speech acts?*
- *What role do declarative and procedural knowledge have on individual task responses?*
- *How may affect and intrinsic motivation impact on student responses?*

4. Data collection

First, students were given an orientation on how to use YackPack in the last 15 minutes of class time in the second week of the semester. Students were then asked to record their speaking on YackPack for durations of between 1 and 2 minutes each week, and send sound files to the instructor for analysis. The instructor would listen to students' speaking, and transcribe what was being said. The instructor then looked at word count, rate of speech, lexical errors, lexical density, lexical complexity, other miscellaneous factors, as well as CSs being applied. In addition, academic words were tabulated by running students' speaking through an online lexical profiler (<http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng/>).

5. Subjects

The study group was chosen from four AE classes taught by the instructor: 11 Economics majors, 5 Science and Engineering majors, 8 Agriculture majors, and 7 Culture and Education majors. The Culture and Education majors had to be eliminated from the study as they missed one week in the middle of the study because of class cancellation due to a university festival. This brought the study group down to 24 students.

Of the 11 Economics majors, one student did not participate because of technical difficulties logging into YackPack. This student was given alternative homework assignments to do, instead. Three Economics students did not complete all five weeks, so

they were eliminated, as their data would have skewed results. In total, seven Economics majors were included in the study.

Of the 5 Science and Engineering majors, one had to be eliminated because the student in question did not attempt to participate; another had to be eliminated because the student in question did not submit speaking tasks for all five weeks. In total, three Economics majors were included in the study.

Of the 8 Agriculture majors, one had to be eliminated because the student in question did not attempt to participate; another had to be eliminated because that student did not submit speaking tasks for all five weeks. In total, six Agriculture majors were included in the study.

Therefore, the sample population for the study ended up being 16 AE students from three faculties.

6. Classroom Environment

The instructor adopted a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach for his classes that focused mainly on oral skills and vocabulary development. Approximately 60 to 70 minutes of each 90 minute lesson involved students participating in communicative activities, which sometimes included reading, writing, and listening, as well. However, the majority of time was spent on role plays, information gaps, simulations, brainstorming, interviewing, questionnaires, and opinion polls. About 20 to 30 minutes of each class was spent on setting up activities, explaining vocabulary and grammar, building a context for activities, and consolidation.

The syllabus followed the lessons sequentially as laid out in the textbook, although frequently individual lessons were supplemented with materials developed by the instructor or downloaded from the Internet. The speaking task questions for the YackPack assignments were always related to the unit that was just covered in the text. The textbook for the course was *Let's Chat* by John Pak (EFL Press).

7. Questions used for the YackPack Speaking Tasks

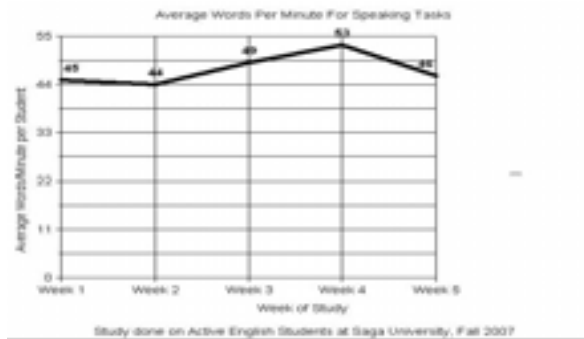
- Week 1 – General Self-Introduction
- Week 2 – What is your scariest experience? Explain why, and describe.
- Week 3 – What is your favorite sport? Explain why, and describe it.
- Week 4 – What would you do if you had one million dollars?

- Week 5 – What is your hometown, and what is it famous for?

8. Analysis

8.1 Speaking Rate

After calculating the students speaking rates, it was discovered that there was little change over the five weeks, although there was a slight increase on the third and fourth weeks of the study. However, by week 5, the speaking rate was still approximately the same as week 1.



There are a few possible explanations for this lack of increase: the timeframe of the study was too short, speaking rate was not a good indicator of improvement for the subjects being studied, or else there could have been cultural/linguistic factors preventing an increase in speaking rate.

In fact, one recent study has shown that fluent speakers of English as a second language from different nationalities do, indeed, have varying rates of speaking in English (Yuan, Liberman & Cieri, 2006). Although Japanese speakers in the aforementioned study were for all intents fluent English speakers, they spoke English at a rate much slower than subjects of other nationalities in the same study. This indicates that there may be some transfer of speaking rate from native tongue to English. Out of the eleven nationalities that were investigated, Japanese had the slowest speaking rate in mother tongue, whereas French had the highest speaking rate in mother tongue. Correspondingly, fluent Japanese English speakers spoke English the slowest, and fluent French English speakers spoke English most rapidly. This correlation is quite noteworthy, indeed.

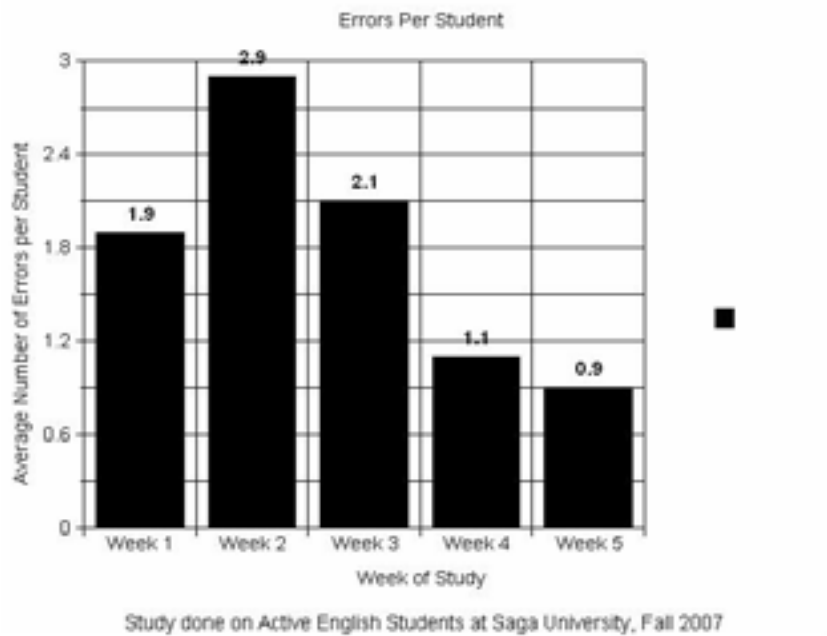


8.2 Error Analysis

The means of measuring accuracy in past literature has been the number of error free clauses as a percentage of the total number of clauses in a passage (Skehan & Foster, 1999). In the Discourse Analysis section of this paper, this very same formula will be implemented. For the time being, the researcher has calculated the total number of errors, instead of a percentage, as some clauses contain multiple errors that would be missed if the previously mentioned formula were used.

When looking at errors, there were significant results over the five weeks of study. Week 1 had a relatively high number of errors. Errors increased significantly on Week 2, remained high on Week 3, but gradually declined on Weeks 4 and 5.

The following graph indicates average number of errors per student over the five weeks of study:



Naturally, the teacher did give some grammatical explanations and corrections in class, as well as corrections and feedback on weekly email writing assignments, but the bulk of classroom time was spent on speaking skills, alongside vocabulary development in context of the lessons.

Perhaps the decrease in errors near the end of the study could in part be the result of greater self-monitoring of speech acts, in other words, greater metacognition (Oxford, 1990). Also, there seems to be some shift that students are making, on a short-term basis at least, from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. If true, this would agree with Anderson's theory that the more students speak the better they get with practice (Anderson, 1983; 1995).

Unfortunately, the timeframe of the study was too short to show such change. In addition, the results of the present study, in regards to accuracy, contradict the results of Crookes' study; Crookes' study showed little variation in accuracy over time whereas the present study showed considerable improvement in accuracy over time.

A much more plausible answer is that, as the speech acts were carried out for homework on YackPack, students were doing more functional planning, including using dictionaries, grammar books, and other provisions. Also, some students could have been reading off scripts, or rehearsed their speech ahead of time.

8.3 Discourse Analysis to Determine Use of CSs

From now, the study will undertake a discourse analysis to determine whether CSs are being used by students, and how effectively they are using them.

Included in CSs are compensatory strategies to compensate for lack of procedural knowledge; one of the most obvious compensatory strategies, that even native speakers frequently use, is discourse markers. Unfortunately, many Japanese EFL students code-switch, and use Japanese discourse markers in their English speaking. The instructor has noted this phenomenon in his classes annually, at several universities. Therefore, he has made a point of teaching discourse markers explicitly in all his general communication classes.

Interestingly, four out of the 16 students being studied used Japanese discourse markers the first week. This number dropped to two students on the second week, and virtually no students were using Japanese discourse markers by the third week.

Additionally, other CSs began to diminish, as well. In fact, the first week's speaking tasks seemed the most natural, and easiest to analyze. Here is one example from the first week:

A: My house is surrounded by moun...green...nandatakke...and...

This simple example has five CSs in it. The student almost said the word "mountain". However, "mountain" was an *approximation* for another word the student really wanted to say. The student then attempted a repair by using the word "green", indicating *transferring*; "green" is a literal translation of the Japanese word "midori". The student then tried *code-switching* by saying the Japanese discourse marker "*Nandatakke?*", with the literal meaning "*Uh...What is it?*", which could, also, be interpreted as an *appeal for assistance*. Finally, when the student couldn't find the correct word, the student resorted to *abandonment*. Still, we can observe definite use of interlanguage which would be expected in such unplanned speech.

It was very difficult to analyze any of this student's later speaking tasks as they all appeared scripted. In fact, the more the study progressed the more scripted several students' speaking tasks appeared.

Therefore, it would be interesting to undertake a qualitative analysis of two students: one, whose speaking appears to be unscripted throughout the study, and another, whose speaking appears to be scripted throughout the study. In addition to a general descriptive analysis, the researcher has decided to investigate factors such as lexical density, lexical complexity,

fluency, accuracy, and CS implementation.

For calculations used in this study, proper nouns such as peoples' names and names of places have been omitted, so have salutations and Japanese words. Further, contractions have been counted as one word. If the same word has more than one function, for example "reading" as a noun as opposed to "reading" as a verb, or "to" as a preposition as opposed to "to" fronting an infinitive, these have been counted as separate words.

In the research literature, two different definitions have been given for lexical density:

- lexical density (definition A) – the number of lexical (content) words multiplied by 100 divided by the total number of words, including non-lexical words such as pronouns, articles, verbs, etc. (Ure, 1971)
- lexical density (definition B) – the ratio of different words to the total number of words in a given text (Richards, Talbot Platt & Weber, 1985)

For simplicity, the researcher has adapted the latter. Further, the researcher will use the two following definitions for *lexical complexity* and *accuracy*:

- lexical complexity – the number of clauses divided by the number of *c-units*, simple clause, or an independent subclausal unit, together with the subordinate clauses associated with them (adapted from Foster & Tonkyn, 1997)
- accuracy – the number of error free clauses as a percentage of the total number of clauses (Skehan & Foster, 1999, p. 106)

It should be noted, though, that this study is focusing more on qualitative observations of two particular students, as the researcher hopes to gain insights into depth of performance on tasks, as opposed to merely statistical information that would only reveal over all trends.

From now, attention will be turned to the two students under investigation.

A. Student Whose Speaking Appears to be Unscripted

The following student appeared not to be planning his speaking tasks ahead of time, and his progress over the five weeks seemed much more natural. Below are his five speaking scripts

and an analysis:

Week 1:

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. Let me introduce myself. My name is K. I'm from Nagoya. Recently, my best hobby is the guitar. I don't have a TV, but I'm not boring because I have a guitar. Also, I'm interested in cooking. I have started live by myself since April. I want to do all of what I can do.

The first week K used very few CSs, and made a few grammatical errors, most notably, “boring” instead of “bored”, and the omission of “to” after “started”, as well as the inappropriate use of “best”. As a result, the accuracy of this passage is 62.5%.

There may be an example of *transferring* in the last sentence as “all of what I can do” is grammatically correct, but not naturally spoken, and seems to be a direct translation of the Japanese “nan demo dekiru koto”. Clearly, he has not been able to retrieve an appropriate equivalent in English, so instead he successfully applies a compensatory strategy to convey his meaning. However, K is grammatically correct with his sentence:

Subject + verb + infinitive + object

The lexical density of the aforementioned passage is 1.5. The passage has one subordinate clause:

because I have a guitar

Yet, the clause is embedded into the sentence correctly.

Week 2:

Hello. Mr. Meyerhoff. I'm K....dame kana...Today will speak my scary story. When I was a younger boy, my birthday party was held in my house. My brother and I were took a picture in front birthday cake. Two weeks later the photograph was developed. I realized an inscrutable photograph. My body and neck weren't connected. I was very scared. See you.

In the first sentence, K used *code-switching*, as well as near *abandonment*, at the same time

when he said “dame kana”, meaning “it’s impossible”. Also, there are a few clear grammar mistakes here, as well. The accuracy of this passage is 71.4%.

Minor grammatical errors aside, what is most striking is his use of the word “inscrutable” which is far too formal for the context, indicating that it is a literal translation of some Japanese word.

Only one subordinate clause has been implemented in this passage, but with no difficulty. However, there is one major difference in regards to lexical complexity. K has attempted to use the passive voice four times, whereas in the first passage he used only active structures. Obviously, one of the passive sentences caused some difficulty for K:

My brother and I were took a picture in front of birthday cake

This example agrees with what has been stated in previous research (Crookes 1989) that complexity and accuracy appear to compete against one another, and the more complex the learner becomes with language the more prone the learner is to make mistakes.

K, at this point, is clearly demonstrating behavior indicative of an associative stage, between declarative and procedural stages, and he is, likewise, taking risks and making mistakes, which is an important part of his language development. However, at this juncture, a teachable moment had arisen, and the instructor could have helped by intervening with corrective feedback.

As far as lexical density is concerned, there is a slight decrease from the previous week to 1.34.

Week 3:

Hello. Mr. Meyerhoff. My favorite sport is soccer. This game you play on large rectangle. The length about hyaku meter, the width about goju...fifty...sorry...the length about hundred meter...the width about 50 meter...the rectangle had two goals at the middle of both side. We use one ball. One team has eleven player. You have...I have played soccer since high school student. See you again.

Week 3, despite its awkwardness, is full of CSs. “Rectangle” is a clear case of *approximation* for the word “field”. What is more striking, though, is the use of the pronoun “you”. The student has clearly entered an *associative stage* of language use by *personalizing* and *exemplifying* his description. The student then falls back on code-switching with the

Japanese numbers “hyaku” and “goju” instead of their English counterparts “one hundred” and “fifty”. However, the student quickly *repairs* himself by saying “sorry”, and continues with the correct English. The student has also provided examples of phonological reduction by leaving the “s” off of words where “s” definitely belongs. Further, he quickly *repairs* himself by changing “You have” to “I have”, indicating awareness and use of metacognitive skills.

However, his accuracy has dropped drastically to only 30%.

Moreover, on Week 3, K has used no complex lexical structures. On the other hand, his lexical density has gone back up to 1.42, and he shows effective use of CSs, especially through *repair*.

The above passage may have several mistakes, but the student is demonstrating clear negotiations of meaning, which makes it interesting, despite low accuracy and relative simplistic sentence formation.

Week 4:

Hello. Mr. Meyerhoff. If I had one million dollars, let me see...uh...I'm going to go shopping. I want to buy clothes, bike, mirror, pet, island, and etc. And I will start the stocks because I am economics class. Half of one million dollars spend this plan, and the rest of money will be savings. Thank you, Mr. Meyerhoff.

Week 4 marks a clear progression from Week 3. K is using appropriate discourse markers with “let me see”, pausing and then saying “uh”. These discourse markers indicate a definite thought process. K is also starting to make fewer grammatical errors. His accuracy has increased to 57%. Further, he successfully uses the transition “And” to link to sentences together.

Once again, his sentence structures are quite simple, and his lexical density has dropped to 1.28.

Week 5:

Good evening, Mr. Meyerhoff. My name is K. My hometown is called Nagoya. I have lived in Nagoya for 17 years. Nagoya is famous for bed-town. Otherwise, Nagoya is a common place city...Let me see, fisherman, farmer, florist, butcher, fireman, police, salaried worker, office worker, and etc. A lot of common work exists, but the fishery is famous. Thank you. Good-bye.

K's speaking has improved remarkably on Week 5. The only grammatical error is using the word "for" instead of the preposition "as". Consequently, his accuracy has increased to amazing 85.7%. He has also demonstrated more sophisticated transition with the linking adverb "otherwise". In addition, he has demonstrated good use of a discourse marker with "Let me see", indicating a thought process or metacognition. Lastly, he has made good use of the lexical chunk "a lot of".

His lexical density, though, was only 1.2.

Although K did not demonstrate the same language complexity as some students, his speaking was more authentic, less scripted, and showed clear metacognitive progression. From a linguistic perspective, K's speaking was much more revealing than students who spoke more eloquently, with fewer errors, but seemed to have all their speaking mapped out ahead of time.

A. Student Whose Speaking Appeared to be Scripted

The following student appeared to be planning her speaking tasks ahead of time, and her speaking tasks, at first glance at least, seemed much more mixed. Below are her five speaking scripts and analysis:

Week 1

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. Let me introduce myself. My name is Y. I am 18 years old. I was born in Oita. I live in Saga now. I'm majoring in economics. I would like to become a licensed tax accountant. Therefore, I am studying bookkeeping hard. My hobby is reading and working. I spent a lot of time reading books in the library. I like making a list of books which I want to read at my convenience. I enjoy working in the evening. My favorite color is black. Therefore, I often wear black clothes. I hope that I can get along with you. See you.

On Week 1, Y's speaking, on the surface, appears quite fluent. She had no pauses, and spoke at an evenly-paced rate. Further, her speaking is almost error free. Her accuracy is 93.75%.

Y, also, uses relatively more complex vocabulary than K, makes good use of transition words, as well as lexical chunks such as "a lot of" and "at my convenience". Furthermore, with the following, successfully constructed a rather complex sentence, free of errors, and

containing a subordinate clause:

I like making a list of books which I want to read at my convenience.

Y is obviously a more advanced speaker than K. Still, it should be noted that Y has used no discourse markers. Y may be showing greater fluency, as well as more accuracy, than K, yet there is little evidence of CSs and the metacognitive process that occurs in natural, spontaneous speech.

Y's lexical density is 1.39, not so different from K on his first week. However, this figure is misleading for two reasons: Y spoke more than K, which is an achievement in itself, and used more difficult vocabulary than K.

Week 2

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. Let me introduce my scary experience. When I was a high school student, I went to school by train. One day when I got off the train, like usual, I was spoken to by a strange man. And he said "Don't you like me?" I didn't understand his words. He said again, "Do you avoid me?" I had no remembrance him. After that, he said "Are you always seeing me?" and "Shall I be your friend?" I felt as though I was killed from the strange man then. I was quite afraid. I think that human is more fearful than ghosts.

On Week 2, Y has maintained accuracy at 93.75%, and lexical density has altered only slightly to 1.41.

Once again, she is demonstrating some rather complex sentence structures, notably:

One day when I got off the train, like usual, I was spoken to by a strange man.

Not only has she used a subordinate clause, but she has fronted it successfully with "One day". Then, she appropriately places the lexical chunk "like usual" between the subordinate and main clause. Further, she has constructed a perfect passive sentence. Throughout the passage, her narrative skills are excellent. In addition, she frequently embeds quoted speech into her sentences.

Moreover, she is revealing her inner thoughts and feelings (Deacon & Murphey 2001), implying greater autonomy and ownership of her speaking. Also, this adheres to previous research findings that planned narratives exhibit greater syntactic complexity (Ortega 1995).

Week 3

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. Let me introduce my favorite sports. It is walking. When I entered Saga University, I thought I would like to find some new hobbies, so I thought of walking. It is free and good for health. I often walk about one hour in the evening. Walking helps reduce stress, and I enjoy it. It is my hobby in now. I can go to see healthily in the first term two kilometers. I'm very happy, so I would like to continue it. I think sports is good for keeping health, and it is very good for keeping the health, and I'd like to enjoy various sports.

On week 3, Y's accuracy has dropped slightly to 81.25%, yet her lexical density has increased to 1.65. Her lexical complexity has decreased somewhat over the previous week. Noteworthy, she has complete communication breakdown with the following sentence:

I can go to see healthily in the first two kilometers.

In natural speech, a speaker would normally apply one or more CSs in case of communication breakdown such as *pausing, rephrasing, repair, abandonment*, and so forth. The fact that she applied no CSs, and simply continued with her speaking without a pause or even acknowledging her breakdown, indicates lack of metacognition, and is a strong indicator that the speaker is simply speaking without thinking about what she is saying.

Week 4

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. This is Y. If I had one million dollars, this money has lots of uses. In the first place, I will present something for parents' desire as a farewell party. It is because I offer a lot to my parents. I'm most grateful. I would like to make my parents glad. In second place, I would like to use money for my purpose. I have a license so I would like to buy a car, and I would like to go out and play at the various places. I would also like to go to accounting school, and also obtain a license for bookkeeping. I would like to save remaining money. When being necessary, it's used. Maybe my how to use is glamorous, but I'm also happy enough by the condition now. Therefore, I don't want to break the life now by a large sum of money. I think a camera is best. Let me finish my speaking with this.

On Week 4, Y's accuracy has improved remarkably to 55.5%. Her lexical density, though, is about the same at 1.62. Once again, she is integrating more complex structures, such as

subordinate clauses, into her speech. Further, she is demonstrating richer vocabulary, and even making use of CSs.

Of note is the following extract:

Maybe my how to use is glamorous

Obviously, instead of “how to use”, she wanted to say “way of using”. Still, her meaning was conveyed, albeit a little awkwardly. Similarly, there were incidents in the above passage in which Y had gotten her meaning across through *substitution* or *approximation*.

Week 5

Hello, Mr. Meyerhoff. My name is Y. I was born in Oita. I have lived there for 18 years. Oita is famous for hot springs. They are inexpensive and wonderful. Famous food is toriten and kabosu. I'm glad to be able to eat toriten in Saga. I love them. Near my hometown is the Yuki Fujisawa's home. He is the person of the 10,000 yen bill. I respect him. I have visited his home twice. Oita is country, but I think a good place for living.

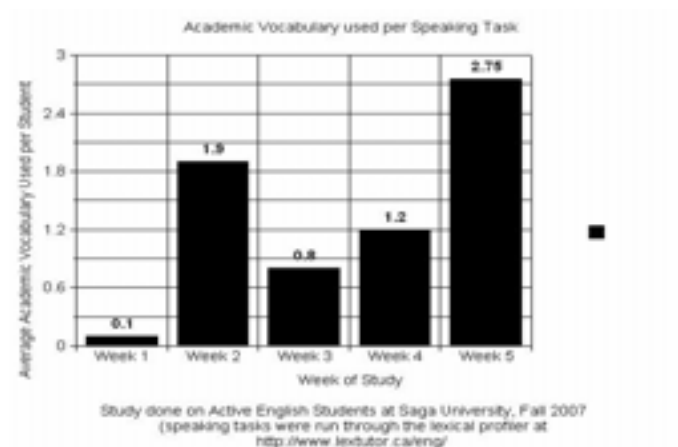
Compared to earlier weeks, Y's Week 5 performance is disappointing, indeed. It is true that she has displayed an accuracy of 100%, but her lexical complexity is 1, meaning that she has used no subordinate clauses and only simple active voice sentences. Further, her lexical density is only 1.39, and she has used no difficult vocabulary.

The passage does reaffirm the assertion that high complexity leads to lower accuracy, and low complexity results in greater accuracy (Crookes 1989). However, Y's rather simplistic performance on Week 5 leads to the question: Why did she not perform up to her previously displayed ability? Although the answer cannot be ascertained completely, it would appear, for whatever reason, that she was not intrinsically motivated to give a more detailed answer.

8.4 Use of Academic Vocabulary over the Five Weeks

As can be seen from the chart below, the use of academic vocabulary increased over the five weeks. However, the researcher is reluctant to draw conclusions from this finding, as students speaking will obviously improve if it has been scripted. One is led to wonder whether students are able to retrieve vocabulary, lexical items, and grammatical knowledge

when speaking is spontaneous as it is needed for real-life communication.



Further, it can be questioned whether language skills are retained only in short term memory, or long term memory, as well.

8.5 Influence of Question-type on Responses

It is difficult to say exactly to what degree question-type influenced responses, although week 4 showed a marked increase in speaking rate. Perhaps this type of hypothetical question engages students, and stimulates intrinsic memory.

Also, of note, Question 2 brought out the most lexically complex, and texturally rich response from Y. Similarly, there was a noted increase in academic vocabulary on the responses to Question 2. Interestingly, Question 2 was the only question that asked students to explain a personal experience.

According to Deacon and Murphey (2001):

Stories, a form of narrative, help us to make sense of our world. Even in academic research, they have been given a higher status.

(Deep Impact Storytelling, Deacon & Murphey, p. 10)

Therefore, asking students to explain such experiences could increase intrinsic motivation as they are negotiating meaning from real life experience. However, it could, also, require sophisticated procedural skills to tackle these tasks. On one hand, students at a procedural level are more engaged as they are interested in the task; on the other hand, students who are

at the declarative stage may give up as they have increased cognitive load, making such tasks too challenging.

Thus, ways of scaffolding students with their speaking tasks from declarative to procedural knowledge are worthy of consideration.

Perhaps Y's poor performance on Question 5 was because the question was too easy for her; likewise, she felt low affect, and merely went through the rote of doing the task as she was bored, or not sufficiently stimulated.

9. Weaknesses of the Study

Firstly, the study was mostly qualitative, and still needs good quantitative research to substantiate many suppositions made. Also, the speaking tasks were done for homework, making it difficult to monitor for planned versus unplanned speech. Further, the transition from declarative to procedural knowledge requires considerable practice and time (Anderson 1983, 1985). It is virtually impossible to give students enough practice over five weeks, and the duration is much too short to expect any major changes.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the study did not have a control and non-control group to measure differences.

10. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher attempted to monitor rate of speaking, as well as accuracy, lexical density, lexical complexity, and the use of academic vocabulary over a five week period using YackPack, to determine if the above features are useful indicators for judging fluency, as well as to determine whether YackPack is an effective tool to use for AE classes speaking homework assignments.

Over all, YackPack appears to be an effective tool as it increases intrinsic motivation, and students can use it at their own leisure when not faced with fatigue and other cognitive strains. Unfortunately, there still seems to be a problem with getting full participation, either due to a lack of technical expertise or an overall willingness to participate.

Noteworthy, as students use YackPack on their own time, and have more opportunities to access outside learning provisions, it can be assumed that there will be more functional planning going on.

In regards to speaking rate, it might not be a primary determiner in determining fluency as there are cultural/linguistic factors that influence speaking rate, as well.

Instead of rate of speaking, the researcher suggests that depth of speaking may play a

greater role in fluency, and as such, more attention needs to be focused on the transition from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge.

Also, more attention needs to be focused on the role of planned versus unplanned speech. Previous research has shown that written discourse is more complex than spoken discourse (Biber 1988). It would then stand to reason that planned speech will be more complex as it resembles written discourse more closely than unplanned speech.

In short, the research posits that both planned and unplanned speaking tasks are important as they develop different skills: planned speech, like writing, allows for greater reflection and depth, whereas unplanned speech creates spontaneity and helps language learners develop effective CSs. Still, unplanned speech should be an ultimate goal to which students gradually scaffold, and not a task demanded from the outset.

11. Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher recommends that quantitative studies be carried out in the future to challenge assumptions made in this paper. In particular, in depth studies monitoring the differences between planned and unplanned speech could prove worthy. Also, question-type should be studied in more detail, as well as the connection between question-type and the progression from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the distinction between *functional* and *non-functional* planning needs to be studied much more carefully.

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Examining Writing: Research and Practice in Assessing Second Language Writing

Stuart Shaw and Cyril Weir. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 344.

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For professionals interested in the principles and technicalities of assessing second language writing, *Examining Writing* offers a key to best practice in this complex area. Intended as a high-level academic statement, it explains the thinking behind the way writing is tested by one of the most prestigious English language examining boards, Cambridge ESOL. Although the volume focuses exclusively on Cambridge exams, its theoretical discussions and ample bibliography are also of interest to anyone involved in testing or researching writing.

Examining Writing begins with an account of the socio-cognitive validity framework. To understand recent developments in testing writing, the text helps readers to comprehend the fundamental underlying construct, which is intended to take cognizance of the interaction between writer traits (communicative language ability, cognitive processes) and context of use (i.e. tasks), rather than proceeding directly from traits to score. Expressed in more general terms, this means that tests have to take in the social dimension of writing, which has been one of the main areas of interest in writing research and pedagogy over the last 30 years. For examination purposes, social aspects, such as writer-reader relations, genre and cultural conventions, have to be built into the task itself. After a detailed explanation of this model, the authors examine each of its components in turn. Chapter 2, on test-taker characteristics, explains Cambridge ESOL's approach to fairness and discusses policies for dealing with some types of permanent disabilities that might affect candidates' performance. Chapter 3 centers on cognitive validity, that is how closely an examination writing task mirrors the cognitive processing involved in writing in real life. The authors show how they incorporate social issues of readership, goals and genre, as part of the writing process at levels from KET (A2) to CPE (C2).

Chapter 4 turns to context validity, understood as the linguistic and content demands

that have to be met in order to write the text successfully. In the authors' view, tests should resemble the performance conditions of real-world contexts. Chapter 5 examines the construct of scoring validity, providing an overview of holistic and analytic rating scales, examiner training, and performance. Chapter 6 looks at the washback effects of testing writing, but focuses mainly on IELTS and CPE and says little about the effects of mainstream examinations such as PET and FCE on classroom practice.

The final two chapters discuss comparisons and correlations between IELTS, Cambridge ESOL, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and underline the nature of the book as a theoretically-based explanation of Cambridge ESOL's practice.

From the perspective of a teacher interested in the theory and practice of second language writing, the book offers an abundance of stimulating material. Among other aspects, it contains a series of detailed case studies (unfortunately not listed on the contents page) which focus on specific issues within the area of testing writing such as the development of a common rating scale (to take in all the CEFR levels) and a lexical analysis of the exams from KET to CPE. At times, however, the book's identity as an account of Cambridge practice leads to curious incongruities such as the chapter on context validity which takes us from Roman Jakobson's theory of linguistics and poetics through to storage of exam packets in reinforced metal cabinets. The persistent references throughout the book to the shortcomings of the CEFR, such as "there is nothing in the CEFR about response format" (p. 66) or the complaint that the CEFR only defines texts as short or long, without giving actual word length (p. 81), also seem somewhat out of place. Nevertheless, despite these irregularities *Examining Writing* is surely essential reading for anyone involved in serious language assessment.



Communication across Cultures

Heather Bowe and Kylie Martin. Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
Pp. ix + 208.

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Bowe and Martin, both from Monash University in Australia, cast their net widely in choosing aspects of cross-cultural communication to focus on. The result is a reminder of the many subtle ways in which speakers of a new language may fail to communicate as intended. Although advertised as a book for linguistics students and for non-linguistics researchers, it should be useful also to language teachers.

The short first chapter sweeps broadly over concepts explored over the past thirty years, including culture, directness and indirectness, naming and addressing. Details show how concepts develop over time, such as the word *culture*, which once referred uniquely to “the tending of crops and animals” (p. 2). Chapter two, about direct and indirect messages, then builds on the work of Austin and Grice from the mid-1900s. An example of an underlying message sets the scene as we ponder this announcement by a teenager to a mother: “I’ve come straight home from school today” (p. 9). Readers can also find differences from one language group to another such as the Vietnamese tolerance for ambiguity, a discussion which leads to chapter three, “Politeness and face.” As with the other chapters, examples are sourced widely, in this case from speakers of Zulu, Arabic and Japanese and others.

The content is organized so that later chapters keep returning in greater depth to earlier topics. Chapter four revisits speech acts and politeness across cultures by referring specifically to requests, complaints, apologies and how to accept them. There is plenty here for teachers to pass on. Chapter five, on conversational analysis, includes information on the roles of laughter. In chapter six the subject matter becomes more serious: Power relations and stereotyping. Hofstede’s table of cultural dimensions will no doubt provoke discussion as readers assign their cultures to such categories as small power distance or ‘large power

distance. Chapter seven, one of the longest, is about the ways we name and address one another with details such as the relationship between “and “faithful servant” (p. 99), or, more contemporarily, employer and employee. There is also fascinating data on the use of honorifics.

Chapter eight turns from the spoken to the written word. The diagrammatic representation of a Japanese text is sobering in its detail and its difference from the traditional English essay. Chapter nine is about interpreting and translating. To support workers in this important field there is information about training opportunities. Chapter ten opens with data collected in Melbourne from the minefield of intercultural communication amongst professionals and other workers and uses court data showing the answers of an Aboriginal court witnesses to underline the problem.

The book ends on a positive note with chapter eleven, “Towards successful intercultural communication,” which shows how successful communicators must establish common ground: Let us not lose patience with those who repeat themselves; it turns out that repetition has at least nine purposes.

The authors have an easy style; in fact in places there is a sense of listening, perhaps to their lectures. Another interesting feature is one which makes the book’s references easy to follow up: Each of the eleven chapters ends with a few titles of “Suggested further reading” which reappear (along with many more) in the final list.

At 194 pages, *Communication across cultures* is a good value and a reminder of how far we have moved since the 1970s work on cross cultural communication--a book which is warmly recommended to both language teachers and their trainers. The only drawback is that readers might be so absorbed by the topic that they find themselves becoming unduly analytical of every conversation they are part of, in and beyond the home.



Analyzing Learner Language

Rod Ellis and Gary Barkhuizen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. x + 404.

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Analyzing Learner Language explores the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in a novel way. By drawing on samples of learner language as the primary source of evidence of how learners learn a second language (L2) and guiding readers through the different methods of analyzing these samples, the book helpfully uncovers the fundamental issues of a multidisciplinary, a complex field of enquiry. Representing “an eclectic and pluralistic approach” to examining SLA (p. 195), the book’s 15 chapters prove themselves to be a valuable reference for novice researchers who wish to familiarize themselves with methods of empirical studies in SLA and build their knowledge of the field through first-hand experience with learner data.

Chapter 1 introduces the authors' purposes and explains their motivation in writing the book. It also defines relevant key terms and examines the research paradigms, within which SLA research has been developed and undertaken. Chapter 2 presents and discusses the variety of methods that SLA researchers typically employ to gather samples of language use and verbal reports from L2 learners.

Chapters 3 through 13 illustrate the various methods of analysis of learner language that are associated with the research paradigms considered in chapter 1 and follow a similar format. Each chapter begins with a historical and theoretical overview of the method in focus, followed by an explanation of how to conduct the analysis, and is exemplified with a relevant study. Each chapter then concludes with a reader’s hands-on task and the authors’ final comment.

Chapter 3 deals with error analysis, a research tool for investigating learners' linguistic errors that is closely associated with the nativist view of language learning and the theory of interlanguage. Chapter 4 discusses obligatory occasion analysis, a method often employed in L2 morpheme studies for establishing the natural order in which learners

universally acquire L2 forms. Chapter 5 examines the developmental routes of L2 learning via what is referred to as frequent analysis or interlanguage analysis. Unlike the previous chapters which focus on the formal aspect of language learning, chapter 6 examines the functional characteristics of learner language via two types of analysis, namely form-function and function-form analyses, which show how learners make use of their linguistic knowledge to meet their communicative needs.

Chapter 7, drawing on an information-processing framework, addresses the various methods for measuring accuracy, complexity and fluency of learner language with a view to accounting for the effects of task types on learners' performance. Chapters 8 and 9 both analyze learning as it takes place in interaction. However, while chapter 8 draws on the theory and methods of discourse analysis, chapter 9 employs conversational analysis. Chapter 10 investigates learner language in terms of assisted performance, drawing on the socio-cultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's perspective on the Zone of Proximal Development.

Chapter 11 deals with the qualitative method of analyzing learners' verbal reports on their L2 learning experience. Chapter 12 adds a critical perspective, addressing the issues of identity and power relations in language learning as uncovered by looking at what learners say about their learning. Chapter 13, making use of learners' self-report data, explores metaphor analysis, a method for understanding learners' conceptualizations of their language learning experiences.

Chapter 14, borrowing the techniques of corpus linguistics and contrastive analysis, introduces the use of corpus analysis software for investigating learner corpora in order to understand the nature of L2 learning. Finally, chapter 15 concludes the book by summarizing the discussions of what it means to acquire a L2 with reference to the variety of methods of analysis considered previously. In so doing, the chapter brings together the key areas in SLA research and recaps the close links between research problems and research tools.

In short, *Analyzing Learner Language* makes an outstanding addition to SLA literature. The authors successfully present challenging subject matter in a reader-friendly manner without unnecessarily sacrificing its breadth and depth. Readers who are interested in the field of SLA will definitely find this scholarly work an essential and intellectually stimulating read. The only criticism, if any, is the absence of answer keys to the reader's tasks and a glossary of terms at the end of the book.

Teaching Reading to Adult Second Language Learners: Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Applications, and Current Issues

Meena Singhal. Lowell, MA: The Reading Matrix, 2006. Pp. 249.

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Singhal's *Teaching Reading to Adult Second Language Learners: Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogical Applications, and Current Issues* is a comprehensive text which covers the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching reading in the adult ESL/EFL classroom.

Although the book is primarily designed to serve as a resource book for reading teachers, it can also be used as a textbook by language teacher educators.

The author organizes the book in ten chapters with equal emphasis on information, research, and practical application. Serving as a foundation for the other chapters in the book, chapter 1 provides historical perspectives as well as theoretical and practical models of reading. Bottom-up, top-down, interactive reading models, and main pedagogical approaches to the development of reading comprehension are all covered in this chapter. Chapter 2 presents prominent areas of empirical research in second and foreign language reading. Research conducted to identify the relationship between reading comprehension and reading strategies, strategy training, metacognitive awareness, background knowledge, and orthographic knowledge are thoroughly discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between computer-assisted instruction and reading. This chapter provides a very well-organized presentation of the foundations of computer-assisted instruction and its application to current ESL/EFL reading classrooms.

Chapter 4 focuses on the connection between reading comprehension and some of the factors that influence reading processes such as cognitive development, L1 proficiency, metacognitive knowledge, and cultural citations. The author closes this chapter with an excellent discussion of pedagogical implications as related to factors influencing reading. The next chapter, chapter 5, is a very useful one in terms of practical application as it provides a battery of reading activities and strategies that can be employed during the pre,

during, and post-reading stages of a reading lesson. Addressing an important aspect of teaching reading to adult second language learners, chapter 6 focuses on using literature in the L2 classroom. This chapter not only discusses the theoretical perspectives such as the advantages of using literary texts and criteria for selecting literature, but it also provides a wide variety of examples of activities incorporating literature in the reading classroom.

Chapter 7 points out the importance of vocabulary in reading. The chapter opens with an overview of several approaches to second language vocabulary acquisition and is followed by examples of various methods and strategies in vocabulary teaching. Chapter 8 provides a wide variety of information on another crucial aspect of L2 reading instruction: reading assessment. Journals, portfolios, comprehension questions, communicative tasks, and computer-based testing are some of the various assessment techniques illustrated in this chapter. Chapter 9 goes one step further than planning and implementing a single reading lesson by exploring specific steps involved in designing an entire reading course. Throughout the chapter, examples from various ESL reading courses are used to explain various aspects of a reading course design such as identifying the objectives, selecting the material, and deciding on evaluation tools. Being relatively shorter but equally important and intense, chapter 10 is devoted to the issues of professional development and reflective teaching. This chapter emphasizes the importance of self-evaluation and self-development in order to improve reading classes continuously. It is also worth mentioning that, apart from the main chapters, this book has a nice appendix section which lists various Internet sites related to teaching reading.

Singhal's book is an important resource for teachers and teacher trainers not only because it encapsulates all the crucial aspects of L2 reading instruction, but also because it provides up-to-date information and illustrations about the connection between theory and practice in the areas of ESL and EFL teaching. The successful balance of theoretical and practical information throughout the entire text and well-organized, easy-to-follow chapters make this book ideal for its intended audience. The author could have, however, made the book more appealing to teacher trainers with the addition of some simple tasks and discussion questions specifically designed for pre-service language teachers. Regardless, this book, with its rich content and successful design, is a highly significant contribution to the field



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The *Asian EFL Journal Quarterly* is a fully peer-reviewed section of the journal, reviewed by a team of experts in EFL from all over the world. The *Asian EFL Journal* welcomes submissions written in different varieties of world Englishes. The reviewers and Associate Editors come from a wide variety of cultural and academic backgrounds and no distinction is made between native and non-native authors. As a basic principle, the *Asian EFL Journal* does not define competence in terms of native ability, but we are a strictly reviewed journal and all our reviewers expect a high level of academic and written competence in whatever variety of English is used by the author. Every effort will be made to accept different rhetorical styles of writing. The *Asian EFL Journal* also makes every effort to support authors who are submitting to an international journal for the first time. While major revisions may be requested, every effort is made to explain to authors how to make the necessary revisions.

Each submission is initially screened by the Senior Associate Editor, before being sent to an Associate Editor who supervises the review. There is no word minimum or maximum.

There are two basic categories of paper:

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Referencing: Please refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.) – Contributors are also invited to view the sample PDF guide available on our website and to refer to referencing samples from articles published from 2006. Due to the increasing number of submissions to the *Asian EFL Journal*, authors not conforming to APA system will have their manuscripts sent back immediately for revision. This delays publication and taxes our editorial process.

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i) The document must be in MS Word format.

ii) Font must be Times New Roman size 12.

Section Headings: Times New Roman (Size 12, bold font).

Spacing: 1.5 between lines.

iii) 'Smart tags' should be removed.

iv) Footnotes must not 'pop up' in the document. They must appear at the end of the article. Use the superscript font option when inserting a note rather than the automatic footnote or endnote option.

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Use the APA format as found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA), 5th Edition, for headings, citations, reference lists and in text referencing. Extra care should be taken for citing the Internet and must include the date the site was accessed.

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