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Using Partial Dictation of an English Teaching Radio Program to Enhance EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This paper reports pervasive decoding/listening problems of word recognition and word segmentation in connected speech at normal speed among Taiwanese university EFL students at the intermediate level. In order to resolve these serious listening problems, an activity of which integrates partial dictation with listening to an English teaching radio program appropriate to students' English proficiency was designed by synthesizing findings, suggestions, and proposals of various FL/EFL researchers. It was then implemented in an intermediate-level Freshman English class with 31 Engineering students. A valid and reliable listening test served as pre- and post-test and two short teacher-made questionnaires were adopted to collect the necessary data. Significant results of a paired-samples t-test suggest that partial dictation of an English teaching radio program (PDETRP) can effectively improve students' comprehension. Results of two questionnaires revealed that (a) 90% of the students needed the partial dictation handouts to facilitate their listening, (b) 87.0% viewed this listening activity as effectively enhancing their comprehension, (c) 74.2% thought difficulty level of the PDETRP appropriate, and (d) 80.6% considered amount of weekly PDETRP homework as adequate. Suggestions on practical guidelines and stepwise procedures for designing and implementing creative teaching/learning activities are provided. This paper offers a valuable and practical alternative for enhancing FL/L2 listeners' decoding and comprehension skills.

Keywords: listening comprehension, listening difficulties; partial dictation, English teaching radio program

Introduction

Many of my university EFL students at the intermediate level orally complained to me that they (a) knew many words by sight but failed to recognize them by sound, and/or (b) had difficulties separating a connected expression into individual words. Such complaints were empirically verified by results of the pre-course questionnaire (Appendix A) administered to participants of this study immediately after they took the listening pre-test in the first period of the initial class session. About 93.5% of the students reported that they could not immediately recall meanings of familiar-sounding words; 51.6% expressed difficulties in understanding linked words.

The two difficulties are decoding problems, with the second related to word segmentation such as segmenting a cluster of sounds into words. These problems are primarily derived from insufficient knowledge and/or practice of complex English word variations such as resyllabification (linking or liaison), reduction, assimilation, and/or elision which occur in normal-speed connected input, as highlighted in many of the EFL listening literature (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Goh, 2000; Huang, 1999; Katchen, 1996; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003; Wu, 1998; Yen 1988).

The first listening difficulty is related to the problem of word recognition (inability to recognize known words or associate sounds with words) and mainly results from an underdeveloped listening vocabulary, which is pervasive among Chinese-speaking EFL learners¹ (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Yen 1988). One reason for this phenomenon is that Chinese-speaking EFL learners put more effort into memorizing spelling and thus overlook how words sound (Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Yang, 2005). Another possible reason is that Chinese-speaking EFL learners have insufficient practice in and/or exposure to normal-speed English acoustic input in their EFL contexts (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Yang, 2006; Yen, 1988; Yen & Shiue, 2004). Listening is not tested on the national joint high school and college entrance examinations (Yen, 1988; Yen & Shiue, 2004); therefore, the students are given limited exposure to it.

To solve the problems mentioned above on decoding/listening skills, word recognition and word segmentation, a teaching/learning activity that integrates partial dictation (PD) with listening to an English teaching radio program (hereafter ETRP) was designed by synthesizing the proposals and results of past empirical studies. However, integrating PD

with listening to an ETRP is an innovative activity with effects yet to be determined, and hence meriting this empirical study. This study investigated the effectiveness of this integrative listening activity and examined Taiwanese EFL learners' attitudes toward it.

Literature Review

Decoding Problems

Although decoding (bottom-up² processing) and meaning building (top-down³ processing) are highly interdependent and equally crucial for successful L2 listening (Nunan, 2002), recent approaches and studies on teaching listening have tended to emphasize on building meaning from context, listening for gist, and employing listening strategies (Field, 2004). Conversely, approaches to enhancing listeners' decoding skill have been comparatively undervalued or overlooked (Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Ridgway, 2000; Wilson, 2003), spawning decoding problems such as word recognition and word segmentation, which continuously impede FL/L2 comprehension (Chang, Chang, & Kuo, 1995; Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2003; Goh, 2000; Katchen, 1997; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wu, 1998; Yen, 1988). Some FL/L2 researchers (Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003) asserted that decoding is no less important than meaning building in developing FL/L2 listeners' comprehension. They asserted that it should be sufficiently practiced in and/or outside of listening classes.

To illustrate how word recognition and word segmentation have been consistently identified as major listening difficulties over the past two decades, Table 1 reports selected studies conducted with Taiwanese EFL college students in chronologically ascending order.

Table 1: *Studies on Listening Difficulties of Taiwanese EFL College Students*

Study	Participant	Top Five Listening Difficulties/Problems
Yen (1988)	24 senior English majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. sound discrimination 2. division of sound stream into words 3. stress and intonation 4. vocabulary: (a) <i>words</i> familiar in print but unfamiliar in sounds and (b) unfamiliar/new words 5. phrase: unfamiliar/new idioms
Chang et al. (1995)	264 freshmen with different majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fast speed 2. cluster of sounds difficult for segmentation 3. association of sounds with words and meanings 4. obsession with the Chinese translation 5. idiomatic expressions

Katchen (1996)	23 junior and senior English majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. new vocabulary 2. slang and idioms 3. linking and/or elision due to fast speed 4. unfamiliar accent 5. insufficient knowledge of native speakers' culture 	
Chen (2002)	190 sophomores and juniors with different majors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. chunking streams of speech 2. neglecting the next part when thinking about meaning 3. recognizing known words 4. confusing about the key ideas in the message 5. forming a mental representation from words heard 	
Sun (2002)	40 freshmen	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. forgetting meaning of the (known) word 2. forgetting what is heard 3. neglecting the next part when thinking about meaning 4. segmenting speech 5. understanding intended meaning 	
Chao & Chien (2005)	180 English majors	<p>Lower graders met more difficulties in</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identifying single words in a stream of speech 2. segmenting sentences 3. recognizing familiar words 4. getting main ideas 5. catching up with the speed (p. 299) 	<p>Low achievers met more difficulties in</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identifying single words in a stream of speech 2. recognizing familiar words 3. dividing content into meaningful parts 4. memorizing the text 5. getting main ideas

Solutions to Decoding Problems

Small-scale full dictation

Field (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008) proposed a remedial approach on teaching decoding skills whereby instructors first identify decoding difficulties, and then design micro-scale dictations or exercises to resolve them. Field (2008) further advocated dictated passages or sentences being read in an authentic (natural and informative) way or gleaned from naturalistic or authentic recordings. This activity includes (a) a small amount of acoustic input and time, (b) authenticity, and (c) a focus on a specific decoding or listening problem at a particular time.

Similar to Field's studies (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008), Rahimi (2008) administered 50 small-scale dictations within one semester as a teaching tool to 34 Iranian EFL university students who gained significantly more on listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar post-tests compared to 31 peers who were not provided with dictation. The length of texts ranged from 50 to 150 words, with each text read three times at normal speed the first and third times, but in chunks with pauses for the second time. Rahimi's findings support Field's proposal for small-scale dictation as a teaching technique to enhance FL/L2 listeners' decoding ability.

Significant effects of small-scale dictation on English proficiency might not be obtained if dictation serves only as a testing tool instead of as a teaching tool. Jafarpur & Yamini (1993) administered 60 small-scale dictations within one semester to 22 Iranian university students using dictation as a testing tool. Gains in scores on reading, listening, vocabulary, and grammar post-tests of the dictation group ($n_1 = 22$) were found to be significantly higher than that of the comparison group ($n_2 = 22$) which was not given dictation. The main difference between Rahimi's and Jafarpur & Yamini's studies is that the former used dictation as a teaching tool with instructions on phonological, grammatical, and lexical points, while the latter study used it as a testing tool. From these studies, it can be tentatively concluded that using dictation as a teaching tool can help to improve EFL university students' listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary skills.

Nation and Newton (2009) considered dictation a valuable language-focused teaching and learning technique. In terms of teaching technique, they pointed out that instructors can design activities to enhance students' perception of errors detected through dictation. As a learning technique, dictation provides feedback on students' perceptual errors and gaps, which helps raise consciousness or awareness of these errors. Nation and Newton's findings support Field's proposal on the use of dictation to enhance FL/L2 listeners' decoding ability.

Partial dictation

Nation and Newton (2009) considered partial dictation (PD) as an easier variant of full dictation and a plausible activity in enhancing FL/L2 listening ability. Students are provided with an incomplete written text and fill in missing words while listening to an oral version of the text. Some FL/L2 researchers recommended the use of PD as a reliable, valid, and plausible listening test (Buck, 2001; Hughes, 1989; Nation & Newton, 2009). Buck (2001) supports Hughes' (1989) suggestion on the use of PD for low-level students when dictation proved too difficult for the students. Using PD helps students focus on missing parts, making it easier for them to follow the text and/or to get its main points. Lin (2003) reported that the cloze-test task or partial dictation was regarded as helpful by her Taiwanese 10th grade higher achievers in comprehending authentic English broadcasts.

Extensive comprehensible listening

Nation and Newton (2009) stressed that language courses should contain substantial quantities of receptive activity. Cross (2009b) and Nunan (2002) suggested providing EFL/ESL listeners with substantial authentic input and practice to facilitate their application

of listening strategies. Krashen (1996) and Dupuy (1999) recommended *narrow listening*, which is listening to a series or large amount of authentic comprehensible recordings or materials on the same topic. Ridgway (2000) suggested that exposure to extensive amounts of comprehensible listening is an effective way of enhancing comprehension. He further claimed that “*Practice is the most important thing. The more listening the better, and the subskills will take care of themselves as they become automatized.*” (Ridgeway, 2000, p. 183). Although more does not necessarily mean better, a large amount of comprehensible listening is considered critical to listening comprehension by many FL researchers (Cross, 2009b; Dupuy, 1999; Krashen, 1996; Nation & Newton, 2009; Nunan, 2002; Ridgway, 2000).

Listening while reading

To both develop Chinese/Taiwanese EFL learners’ listening vocabulary and to enhance their word recognition ability, Goh (2000) and Tsai (2004) recommended listening-while-reading activity to help listeners associate spoken forms of words or sounds with written forms or spellings, which in turn helps to strengthen sound-to-word relationships in the long-term memory. This suggestion is in line with Hulstijn’s (2001, p. 285) proposal of *bimodal input*, whereby learners are encouraged to watch television programs, both spoken and subtitled, in the target language.

Integrating PD with ETRP as a Solution to Decoding Problems

Although Field’s micro-scale dictation activity has to be effective in enhancing EFL learners’ comprehension according to Rahimi (2008), from a viewpoint of substantial input, this activity does not seem to reach that “substantial” criterion in my own context, since English courses at the university are scheduled to meet only once a week. Consequently, the maximum number of micro-scale dictations with a text of 50~150 running words that are able to be conducted within a semester is 18, while the number of running words for students to transcribe in a semester ranges from 900 to 2700, which does not seem “substantial”.

This study integrated partial dictation (PD) with ETRP taking into account the proposals and research results of past studies that include: (a) decoding training via small-scale dictation (Field, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2008; Rahimi, 2008), (b) substantial comprehensible listening (Cross, 2009b; Dupuy, 1999; Krashen, 1996; Nation & Newton, 2009; Nunan, 2002; Ridgway, 2000), and (c) listening while reading (Goh, 2000; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsai, 2004). Partial dictation (PD) with ETRP was adopted mainly as a teaching/learning activity to teach or practice particular decoding skills while listening to an ETRP. This was conducted to

expose students to large amounts of acoustic input within many known words. A partial transcript of one day's ETRP allows students to listen while reading, which in turn could help students connect acoustic sounds with words or phrases. Thus, 'partial dictation of an English teaching radio program' (hereafter PDETRP) combines task-driven (Field, 2000) and text-based approaches (Ridgway, 2000) optimal for augmenting listening abilities. It contains both language-focused learning (e.g. dictation) and meaning-focused input (e.g. listening to English teaching radio program with its partial transcript), as advocated by Nation & Newton (2009). Yet PDETRP is a novel activity with effects yet unknown, thus prompting an empirical study on this issue. The current study is intended to address this gap.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study investigated the effects of PDETRP on Taiwanese EFL learners' listening comprehension and their attitudes toward both PD handouts and toward PDETRP in terms of difficulty level, effectiveness, and amount of weekly homework. The following are the research questions of the study:

1. Can PDETRP significantly improve Taiwanese EFL freshmen's listening comprehension ability?
2. Do participants of this study need PD handouts? Why or why not?
3. What are participants' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of listening homework?

Methodology

Participants of the Study

The participants were 31 engineering students in an intermediate-level Freshman English class. All had at least six years of formal English education in secondary school. About 94% of the students knew the first 1000 high-frequency word families assessed by a 1000-word Level Test designed by Huang (1999) and based on Nation's (1990) principles of designing vocabulary level tests. 74.19% obtained the second 1000 high-frequency word families; however most still lacked in the third and the fifth 1000 high-frequency word families assessed by Schimtt's (2000) Levels Test: Version 1. The students' average scores on the Schimtt's Levels Test (Version 1) of 2000-word, 3000-word, and 5000-word were 26.06, 20.33, and 15.5, respectively. The perfect score for each Level Test was 30 and the passing score was 25 (Nation, 2001, p. 196).

Freshman English Course

Freshman English is a two-credit required course for all freshmen with one meeting per week with two consecutive periods of class per meeting. Freshmen are ability-grouped into three levels: low, intermediate, and high-intermediate, according to scores on English tests administered by the Center of National Joint College Entrance in Taiwan. The main goals of the Freshman English course are to: (a) enlarge vocabulary, (b) enhance listening proficiency, (c) inculcate reading skills, (d) improve reading proficiency, (e) develop good reading habits, (f) expand common knowledge, and (g) increase motivation for learning English. One-quarter of instructional time is devoted to listening training and quizzes, and three-quarters to vocabulary and reading related activities, including extensive reading of graded simplified readers, intensive reading, reading strategy training, explicit vocabulary teaching, word guessing, and reading quizzes. Listening quizzes and PDETRP account for 30% of the final grade; self-selected reading of graded simplified readers, 20%; intensive reading quizzes, 10%; tests on self-study vocabulary, 10%; midterm and final exams, 15% each.

Instruments

The instruments for the study were one listening test and two questionnaires. The listening section of an American Language Course Placement Test (ALCPT) was employed as pre- and post-test to assess listening comprehension before and after intervention (Weeks 1 and 16). The ALCPT is a valid and reliable test (Cheng, et al., 2004), developed by the Defense Language Institute English Center of the United States. Its purpose is to assess non-native English speakers' comprehension of basic English and frequently-used English military expressions. Each ALCPT contains two parts: (1) Listening - which consists of 66 multiple-choice items, and (2) Reading - which is composed of 34 multiple-choice items. The Listening Part assesses basic English listening ability, grammatical competence, and vocabulary (Cheng, et al., 2004). There are two subsections in the Listening Part. Subsection One consists of 56 items; test takers choose the best answer for each item based on a statement or question they hear. Subsection Two contains 10 items; test takers choose the best answer for each item based on a dialogue between a man and a woman. A point is assigned for a correct answer with a maximum score of 66. The time for taking the listening test is about 25 minutes.

Range, a vocabulary analysis tool designed by Nation (available at Paul Nation's website http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/staff/Paul_Nation), was adopted to analyze text coverage of the listening test. Since proper names of persons and places are not included in any vocabulary

level tests, they were excluded from this text coverage analysis. The results indicated 88.44% of the running words (excluding proper nouns) on the listening test were from the first 1000 high-frequency word families, 6.62% from the second, 1.88% from the third, and 3.28% beyond these 3000 high-frequency word families. Based on the participants' mean scores on Schmitt's Vocabulary Levels Test assessing vocabulary size and results of Nation's *Range* analysis, it can be concluded that about 95% of running words on the listening test should be known to most participants.

Two short questionnaires were administered to collect data regarding students' attitudes toward (a) PD handouts, and (b) PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and adequacy in amount of listening homework. Questionnaire 1 (Appendix B) contained 11 items, one of which solicited students' answers to Research Question 2 probing participants' attitudes toward PD handouts. Questionnaire 1 was administered as soon as participants briefly experienced two types of listening to designated ETRP: with and without teacher-made PD handouts. Questionnaire 2 (Appendix C) was a post-course questionnaire with three items exploring answers to Research Question 3 which is on students' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of its effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of weekly homework.

Listening Materials

The listening materials were (a) a back issue (September 2006) of *Studio Classroom* magazine accompanied by a CD-ROM including recordings of all the month's audio content, such as daily radio programs, audio recordings of each article, plus educational video clips, and (b) teacher-made PD handouts on the recordings of daily radio programs. The description of the selection of the first listening material, *Studio Classroom* and the development of the teacher-made PDETRP handouts are detailed in the following two sub-sections.

Studio Classroom

Studio Classroom (SC) is a popular (Sung & Hsieh, 2009) monthly English teaching magazine accompanied by a daily English teaching radio program; it targets Taiwanese EFL high school students/graduates or intermediate learners, broadcasting several times a day and six days a week. Its content encompasses a variety of "news and fads, technological advances, outdoor activities, career, health, celebrity profiles, American lifestyle and short stories" (Studio Classroom, 2010). Many Taiwanese students find them interesting and more related to their lives (Cheng, 2009).

SC was chosen because it meets the three principles of selection of appropriate listening

materials: (a) containing 90% or more known words in context, (b) spoken at a normal speed, and (c) being interesting or meaningful. The reason for principle (a) is that most Taiwanese/Chinese EFL listeners have problems with word recognition or have underdeveloped listening vocabulary (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Goh, 2000; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Yen 1988). Listening material should be easier than their regular reading material and should contain at least 90% of known words by sight for two sub-reasons: (1) to facilitate listening while reading transcripts with most words known and (2) to consolidate sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. The reason for principle (b) is that many English word variations happen in normal-speed speech (Fields, 1999, 2003, 2008) and EFL/ESL listeners need to be taught, reminded of, and made to practice with normal-speed input. The reason for principle (c) is that interesting materials and/or meaningful learning is critical to successful teaching and learning.

Procedure for creating PDETRP handouts

Well-designed handouts form the basis of successful PDETRP, taking substantial amounts of the instructors' time and effort. The procedure for constructing PDETRP handouts thereby merits a special subsection devoted to describing the process through which they were created.

There were four steps in creating the PDETRP handouts necessary for a 25-minute daily English radio program. First, the program was transcribed verbatim. There were almost 3000 running words spoken in one day of *SC*. Second, the instructor identified words or expressions should be deleted. Over 95% of deleted words were known to the majority of students; the chief aim of deleting known words was to provide sufficient practice in recognizing known words and/or strengthening sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. Additionally, less than 5% of deleted words were new; these served to teach, demonstrate, and practice transcription of a new word into phonetic symbols and thus to its spelling which are aided by an electronic dictionary (e.g. Dr. Eye). This skill is crucial for life-long independent learning, for students can often find spelling and meanings of new words on their own. Third, based on deleted words, questions (primarily *wh*-questions) were designed to guide students on what to expect and to focus on. Fourth, phonemic notations of word variations in connected speech (resyllabification, assimilation, elision, and reduction of function words) were supplied in the handouts to both facilitate in-class explanations and to raise students' attention on problematic word variations that reportedly impede EFL/ESL listeners' decoding and/or comprehension.

There are three major elements and two sub-elements of the PDETRP handouts: (a) *wh*-questions, (b) blanks (substituting for deleted words), and (c) partial text (undeleted words) with (c1) phoneme/word variation notations and (c2) underlined collocates. The *wh*-questions and blanks are interdependent and designed to guide students on what to focus on and to listen to during the listening activity. The *wh*-questions serve as signals which alert listeners to identify a missing message. The questions also function as a test bank of listening quiz items. A hard copy of a one-day SC handout normally contains 35~45 questions. Quantity and difficulty level of the blanks substituting for deleted words increase over time. There are three types of blanks in terms of quantity and difficulty level and are developed in stages. In the first stage, deleted items are mainly known words, replaced by blanks with initial and final letters. One reason to do so is to lower the PDETRP difficulty level and bolster listening confidence, motivation, and interest via the experience of understanding and transcribing approximately every deleted word (Hulstijn, 2001). The main task in the first stage is to listen for known words in order to enhance sound-to-word linkage in long-term memory to (partially) solve the word recognition problems. New words are suggested and typed in boldface in the first stage, but deleted for transcribing in the following two stages when or after the skill of transcribing a new word from its phonemic notation has been taught.

After students have experienced two weeks of transcribing known words with initial and final letters to heighten motivation and confidence in PDETRP, the second stage which lasts over four weeks is introduced. In Stage 2, more known words with several new or difficult words are deleted and substituted by blanks with initial letters only. Students are reminded to heed noun declensions (e.g. -s, -es) and verb inflections (e.g. -ed, -s, -ing) with help of their grammatical knowledge. Phrasal expressions (e.g. look at, look for) or chunks of words are deleted and blanks substituting for function words (e.g. prepositions) have no initial letters due to their short spellings (e.g. on, at, for). Additionally, since students are required to transcribe several new words out of 2000~3000 running words, teachers need to clearly demonstrate how to transcribe a new word from its sounds (phonemes) into its phonetic symbols and then into its spelling form (i.e. word) with the aid of an electronic dictionary. Students are also guided or taught regarding the best or correct word by verifying whether its meaning fits the context where the missing word is. Transcribing new words is vital for independent and lifelong English learning and is considered beneficial for Taiwanese EFL students' future independent learning.

In the third stage, even more known words plus 10~12 new/difficult words are deleted and substituted by blanks with neither initial nor final letters for known words, and with initial but

no final letters for new words. Like the second stage, even more chunks of words and phrasal expressions are deleted. Unlike the second stage, blanks have no initial letters. The main function of blanks is to provide information regarding how many words there are in a chunk of missing text, whether an isolated word or (part of) a phrase, to solve problems of word variation, word segmentation, and/or word boundaries, all of which were reported as problematic for EFL listeners by numerous FL/L2 researchers (Chao & Cheng, 2004; Chao & Chien, 2005; Chen, 2002 ; Cross, 2009a; Field, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Goh, 2000; Huang, 1999; Katchen, 1996; Lin, 2003; Sun, 2002; Tsai, 2004; Tsui & Fullilove, 1998; Wilson, 2003; Wu, 1998; Yen 1988). This stage offers students slightly more opportunities to transcribe missing new words substituted by blanks with initial letters only.

The third element of PDETRP handouts, (c) partial text (i.e. undeleted words), serves four purposes. First, it facilitates students' comprehension by allowing them to listen while reading. Second, it enhances their sound-to-word relationships through listening while reading, an activity which is highly recommended by some researchers (Goh, 2000; Hulstijn, 2001; Tsai, 2004). After sufficient listening while reading, students' 'listening vocabulary' should gradually catch up with their 'reading vocabulary'; therefore the problem of word recognition by sound (connecting sounds to a word and then to its meaning) is expected to diminish. The third purpose is to raise students' attention to collocates by underlining them. The fourth purpose is to supply phonemic/word-variation annotations to raise awareness of (problematic) phoneme/word variations.

In summary, providing students with well-designed PDETRP handouts constitutes the essence of successful PDETRP, and it takes much time and effort to formulate effective PDETRP handouts with (a) *wh*-questions, (b) blanks, (c) partial text with (c1) word variation notations and (c2) underlined collocates.

Data Collection and Procedure

At the initial class meeting, *SC* was introduced to students by listening to the selected topic of the day. Next, students were briefly exposed to two types of listening: without PD vs. with PD handouts. They first listened to a one- or two-minute recording of that day's ETRP without handouts, followed by a short listening quiz with two *wh*-questions. Subsequently, they were guided to listen to another one- or two-minute recording of the same day's *SC* with PD handouts, also followed by a similar listening quiz with two *wh*-questions. As soon as students experienced these two opposing scenarios, Questionnaire 1 was administered to collect data on Research Question 2, assessing students' attitudes toward those handouts. In

Week 16, the listening post-test was administered to students without prior notice. In Week 17, post-course Questionnaire 2 was given to them to collect data for Research Question 3, measuring students' attitudes toward PDETRP.

PDETRP was implemented mainly as a teaching/learning activity to enhance listening proficiency and encoding skills for eight weeks (four weeks in a row and before and after midterm exams, respectively). To encourage students to intensively listen to *SC*, they were required to do a PD of only one day, rather than six days, of *SC* per week.

During the eight-week intervention of PDETRP, 50 out of 100 minutes of instructional time per week were allocated to PDETRP associated activities, including: (a) guiding students to listen for daily topics or answers to one or two *wh*-questions (2~3 minutes); (b) explaining, illustrating, and arousing students' awareness of identified decoding difficulties (12 minutes), such as resyllabification, assimilation, reduced forms of function words and reduction of a chunk of words (Field, 2008, pp. 143-155, Field, 2003, pp. 329-332 or Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 42); (c) demonstrating how to transcribe a new word (5 minutes) with aid of an electronic dictionary; (d) administering the listening quiz (15 minutes); and (e) checking and grading answers with students (15 minutes). Except for the first week of PDETRP instruction, which started with Activity (a) and ended with (b), subsequent instruction followed a sequence of (d), (e), (a), (b), and then (c).

For the out-of-class activity, students had to accomplish three PDETRP sub-tasks. First, they transcribed missing words on teacher-created PD handouts by intensively listening to designated ETRP (i.e. *SC*). With nearly 3000 running words on daily *SC*, students normally took 1.5~6 hours to do the PDETRP by intensively listening to a 25-minute recording on the super CD-ROM, equipped with multiple functions to expedite comprehension and self-learning. Students could adjust the speed to their level and repeatedly listen to a certain expression, phrase, sentence, or paragraph.

The second sub-task outside the classroom was self-correction. Some researchers (Davis & Rinvoluceri, 1988; DeFilippo & Sadow, 2006) consider self-checking or self-correction after dictation an active learning activity. After accomplishing the PDETRP, students were encouraged to self-correct answers by checking with me during my office hours, allocated to three weekdays (Monday/Tuesday/Friday), or with their classmates who had finished SDETRP. However, they were discouraged from copying answers without first listening to *SC*. Therefore, answers to the PDETRP activities were not uploaded to the internet or made available online. On the contrary, English low achievers facing extreme difficulties understanding *SC* were advised and allowed to copy answers before listening so that they

could listen and read simultaneously, with the hope that they are able to internalize sound-to-word relationships in long-term memory. Four or five weeks of this would reinforce those relationships, after which low achievers were encouraged to undertake PDETRP before copying answers. However, if they still found PDETRP too difficult, they could retreat to their original procedure of copying answers beforehand. The final out-of-class sub-task was quiz preparation. Students were encouraged to study or review completed PD handouts before a listening quiz.

Data Analysis

A paired-samples t-test was employed to rate differences between mean scores on pre- and post-tests. Frequencies, percentages, and descriptive analysis were employed to analyze data from two questionnaires on students' attitudes toward PD handouts and toward PDETRP. In addition, students' reasons for their attitudes toward PD handouts were typed and analyzed for possible patterns and further understanding of the rationales behind their attitudes toward PD handouts.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1. Can PDETRP significantly improve Taiwanese EFL freshmen's listening comprehension ability?

Table 2 displays the results of the paired-samples t-test on the gain score of the post-test. The mean score of the post-test (40.48) was found to be significantly higher than that of the pre-test (33.6), with p-value smaller than .000, suggesting that PDETRP had significantly improved students' listening comprehension. This finding supports the use of PDETRP as an alternative activity in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension in a teaching context where a class could meet only once a week, instructional time is extremely limited (less than two hours a week), and where frequent (three times/week) micro-scale dictations, as in Rahimi's (2008) study, are somewhat impossible to implement.

Table 2: *Results of Paired-samples t-test on Listening Pre-test and Post-test*

N	Pre-test		Post-test		Post-test – Pre-test	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Gain	p-value
31	33.61	8.50	40.48	7.21	6.87	.000

Research Question 2. Do the participants need PD handouts? Why or why not?

Results of Questionnaire 1 that gauged students' attitudes toward PD handouts indicated that

90.0% of them needed PD handouts mainly to facilitate understanding of the native English teachers' speech at normal speed (which was too fast or too difficult for them to follow or comprehend without handouts). Their response exactly matched the prediction that PD handouts could assist students in following or comprehending native English teachers' instructions or discussion at normal speaking speeds. This finding supports Nation's (2001, p. 121) view that experienced teachers' intuitions and feelings are sometimes useful and should be recognized. Furthermore, it upholds Buck's (2001) proposal of using PD to help low-level listeners keep up with the text and to get at its main ideas.

Research Question 3. What are participants' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of effectiveness, difficulty level, and amount of listening homework?

Table 3 provides a summary of students' attitudes toward PDETRP in terms of efficacy, difficulty, and amount of listening homework. A majority (87.0%) of the students evaluated PDETRP as effective in elevating comprehension by assigning points 5~7 to the item regarding PDETRP effectiveness on a 7-point scale, where 1 point indicates extremely ineffective and 7 extremely effective. Only 6.5% thought PDETRP ineffective in enhancing listening comprehension, assigning 1~3 points to this item. The mean score for effectiveness is 5.28 out of 7, which demonstrates a positive attitude toward PDETRP effectiveness.

Table 3: *Percentage and Descriptive Statistics of Attitudes Toward PDETRP*

Effectiveness (7-point scale)					Difficulty Level			Homework amount/wk		
Eff. (5-7 pts)	Ok (4 pt)	Ineff. (1-3 pts)	Mean	SD	Diff.	App.	Easy	overmuch	App.	Insuff.
87.0%	65%	6.5%	5.35	1.23	3.2%	74.2%	22.6%	9.7%	80.6%	9.7%

Note: Eff. = Effective; Ineff. = Ineffective; Diff. = Difficult; App. = Appropriate; Insuff. = Insufficient; pt = point

As for the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with help from handouts, 74.2% of the students considered it appropriate, 22.6% easy, and only 3.2% difficult. This suggests that ETRP (i.e. SC) is appropriate for most students' English comprehension in terms of difficulty level. Choosing or adopting appropriate listening material is an important task for instructors and the key to successful or effective listening training. Wilson (2000, p. 341) claimed that students will not be motivated by listening texts at the wrong level. Finding listening texts at an appropriate level requires a certain 'feel' for the task, based on teachers' experience with students. Furthermore, Wilson (2003) saw the ability to find appropriate listening material for students as an invaluable skill for teachers.

Nation & Newton (2009) suggest that dictation texts usually contain no words that learners

have not encountered before. This suggestion is useful for teachers in choosing PD texts or ETRPs and to design PD handouts in which all or most words listened to or transcribed should be known or familiar to students. Field (1998, 2000, 2003, 2008) highly recommends using naturalistic or authentic recordings for dictation practice because these contain normal-speed acoustic input with numerous word variations which are problematic and difficult for FL/L2 listeners and thus could help draw special attention to these problems. The above two suggestions are congruent with the first two of my three principles of choosing appropriate ETRP and designing PD handouts: (a) more than 90% known words are in context, (b) it is at normal talking speed, and (c) it is interesting or meaningful. This might explain why 74.2% of the students considered the difficulty level of the PDETRP appropriate, 22.6% easy, and only 3.2% excessive.

As for weekly PDETRP homework, 80.6% of the students perceived the quantity as appropriate, 9.7% too much, and 9.7% insufficient. Overall, most students perceived: (a) PDETRP as effective in upgrading their English listening comprehension, (b) the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with handouts as appropriate, and (c) the amount of weekly homework as adequate.

PDETRP fulfills four of Nation & Newton's (2009, p. 12) ten pedagogical principles for teachers. For instance, requiring students to listen to an ETRP with 2000~3000 running words a week and providing partial transcripts meets the first principle of providing and organizing "*large amount of comprehensible input through both listening and reading (Ibid.)*." Partially dictating an ETRP matches the second principle of "*learning through comprehensible input by adding a deliberate element*" (Ibid.) (i.e. transcribing missing words). Offering word variation annotations and underlined collocates on PD handouts also meets the fifth principle of helping "*learners deliberately learn language items and patterns, including sounds, spelling, vocabulary, multi-word units, and discourse (Ibid.)*." Finally, SDERP concurs with the eighth principle of having "*a roughly equal balance of the four strands of meaning-focused input (e.g. listening to an English radio program), meaning-focused output (e.g. listening for missing words), language-focused learning (e.g. learning word/phoneme variations, collocations, and grammar through teacher's instruction and/or notations on PD handouts), and fluency development (e.g. listening while reading partial texts with known words, repeatedly listening to recordings with known words spoken at normal speed) (Ibid.)*." Nevertheless, there are two possible disadvantages for dictation pinpointed by FL/L2 researchers and practitioners. One is that dictation training may drive students to listen for

every word more than for meaning and thus this method should not be overused (Snow, 1996, p. 109). The other is that listening to an ETRP or an audio recording can be boring because of the lack of visual stimulus (Snow, 1996, p. 113). To mitigate the first drawback, instructors should introduce top-down strategies or activities to students, such as listening for main ideas or topics, listening for specific information (e.g. who, where, when, why, what, how). Moreover, instructors should let students know that dictation is used as intensive listening especially when they are allowed to hear a recording or passage multiple times; otherwise, they need not listen word for word but for gist, topic, or some critical/specific information. As for reducing boredom due to lack of visual stimulus, choosing lessons with interesting or useful content for students to (partially) dictate or listen to is imperative. For example, in order to choose a certain back issue of ETRP magazine with more interesting topics/content, I usually overview the latest seven or eight issues of a designated ETRP's magazine and pick one with the most absorbing topics. Moreover, to alleviate boredom from full dictation, Nation & Newton (2009, p. 60) suggest amusing dictations with useful or interesting content: e.g. humorous or unusual stories, dialogues, poems, puzzles.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study gauged the effects of a novel listening teaching/learning activity, a partial dictation of an English teaching radio program (PDETRP), in an intermediate-level class of 31 Taiwanese EFL university students' comprehension and attitudes toward this innovative activity. Results indicated: (1) PDETRP effectively improved students' listening comprehension, (2) almost all students needed teacher-made PD handouts to expedite their PDETRP, and (3) a majority of students perceived that (a) PDETRP effectively boosted their English listening comprehension, (b) the difficulty level of listening to the designated ETRP with PD handouts was suitable to them, and (c) the amount of weekly PDETRP homework was appropriate. Significant effects of PDETRP, positive attitudes toward PDETRP, and stepwise procedures for designing and successfully implementing this creative activity altogether assure EFL teachers that this can be a feasible alternative for solving students' word recognition and word segmentation problems or enhancing their comprehension, especially in a teaching context where a class meets no more than once a week.

However, this study lacked a control group to validate how much improvement on the listening post-test could be attributed to positive effects of PDETRP instead of other factors such as testing effect, other out-of-class practice unrelated to PDETRP, and obtaining more linguistic knowledge in terms of vocabulary and grammar. In addition, generalizability of the

results of the study is limited due to the small sample size (n=31). There is a need for a similar study, with a bigger sample size and a control group, to further determine the rate of enhancement of comprehension attributable to PDETRP.

¹: Chinese-speaking EFL learners include those learners in/from China and Taiwan. However, Taiwanese EFL learners include only people in/from Taiwan.

²: Decoding and bottom-up processing are interchangeable.

³: Meaning building and top-down processing are interchangeable.

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Appendix A**Pre-course Questionnaire**

Dear Freshmen:

The following short questionnaire pertains to difficulties you confronted on the listening test just administered. Your responses are vital for the instructor to detect problems and thereby design specific activities to surmount listening obstacles. Your answers will be confidential and not affect your course grade. Please rest assured when answering these questions. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. The listening test I just took is _____ for me.
(A. too difficult B. difficult C. neither too difficult nor too easy D. easy
E. too easy)

2. Please check difficulties you encountered while taking the listening test just administered. Put a check to the right of a difficulty. You can check more than one difficulty.

Statement of Listening Difficulty/Problem	
(a) I can't immediately recall the meanings of the words sounding familiar to me.	
(b) I neglect the next part when thinking about a word meaning.	
(c) I quickly forget what is heard.	
(d) I understand every word but not the intended message.	
(e) I have difficulties understanding words linking together.	
(f) The speaking speed is too fast.	
(g) The pause for reading the four choices for each item is too short.	
(h) My vocabulary size is too small to understand the test items.	
(i) I cannot concentrate in listening because _____.	
(j) Other(s) (Please briefly describe it/them) _____.	

Results of Questionnaire 1

Statement	Options	Frequency (%)
1. The listening test I just took is _____ for me.	(a) too difficult	2 (6.4%)
	(b) difficult	6 (19.4%)
	(c) neither too difficult nor too easy	20 (83.9%)
	(d) easy	4 (12.9%)
	(e) too easy	0 (0%)
2. The factors impeding me from understanding the listening test items is/are _____ (can be more than one answer).	(a) I can't immediately recall the meanings of the words sounding familiar to me	29(93.5%)
	(b) I neglect the next part when thinking about a word meaning	22 (71.0%)
	(c) I quickly forget what is heard	5 (16.1%)
	(d) I understand every word but not the intended message	0 (0%)
	(e) I have difficulties understanding words linking together	16 (51.6%)
	(f) The speaking speed is too fast.	2 (6.5%)
	(g) The pause for reading the four choices for each item is too short	7 (22.6%)
(h) My vocabulary size is too small to understand the test items.	22 (71.0%)	

	(i) I cannot concentrate in listening because _____	9 (29.0%)
	(j) Other(s) (Please briefly describe it/them) _____	2 (6.5%)

Appendix B

Questionnaire 1

Dear Freshmen:

The following is a short questionnaire on teaching and learning oral English. Your responses will be confidential and not affect your course grade. Please feel safe and comfortable to answer the following questions without reservation. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. Without teacher-made handouts, to understand conversations and explanations of English teachers Vickie and Steve on *Studio Classroom* is _____.

(A. too easy, and I can comprehend more than 90% of them without much attention.

B. easy, and I can comprehend 80~90% of them with attention.

C. neither too easy nor too difficult, and I can understand 70~79% of them with much attention.

D. difficult, and I can comprehend 50~69% of them with much attention.

E. too difficult, and I can comprehend 10~49% of them with much attention.

F. extremely difficult, and I can understand no more than 10% of them.)

2. Do you need teacher-made handouts to guide you and assist you listen to *Studio Classroom*?

(A. Yes. -→ Because _____

B. No. -→ Because _____

C. Others: (title) _____ . -→ Because _____)

3. Did your high school English teachers require you to listen to programs like *Studio Classroom*?

(A. Yes. Name(s) of English teaching radio program(s): _____

B. No, but I myself listened to it/them. Name(s) of English teaching radio program(s): _____

C. No, and I did not listen to any English teaching radio program.)

4. How often did you listen to designated English teaching radio program(s) while in high school? Why?

(A. Often, because _____

B. Rarely, because _____

C. Sometimes, because _____

D. Never, because _____

E. Never, because my high school English teachers did not require me to listen to any such program.)

5. What was your frequency of hearing these program(s) in different years of high school (HS)?

1st year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____

2nd year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____

3rd year in HS: about _____ days per week, because _____

6. Did your 1st-year high school English teacher give you listening quizzes?

(A. No. B. Yes, about _____ (day[s]/week[s]) a time.

7. Did your 2nd-year high school English teacher give your listening quizzes?
(A. No. B. Yes, about _____(day[s]/week[s]) a time.)
8. Did your 3rd-year high school English teacher give your listening quizzes?
(A. No. B. Yes, about _____(day[s]/week[s]) a time.)
9. Do you think you need to improve your English listening comprehension ability? Why?
(A. No, because _____
B. Yes, because _____)
10. Did you ever live in an English speaking country about or more than one year?
(A. No. B. Yes. -→ _____ year[s])
11. Score on the first listening quiz after listening without handouts: _____;
Score on the second listening quiz after listening with handouts: _____

Appendix C

Questionnaire 2: Post-Course Survey

Dear Students:

This questionnaire collects data regarding **your feedback** on the listening activity. Your answers will not affect your course grade but help the instructor design a better listening activity in the future. Please feel safe and comfortable to answer the questions without reservation. Thanks for your cooperation!

1. I think the partial dictation of *Studio Classroom* (PDSC) listening activity is _____ in improving listening comprehension.
(1. extremely ineffective 2. ineffective 3. somewhat ineffective 4. = okay
5. somewhat effective 6. effective 7. extremely effective)
2. I think the difficulty level of the PDSC listening activity is _____.
(A. extremely difficult B. difficult C. proper D. easy E. extremely easy)
3. I think the amount of homework for the PDSC listening activity is _____.
(A. extremely overmuch B. overmuch C. proper D. insufficient
E. extremely insufficient)



Lexical Bundles and the Construction of an Academic Voice: A Pedagogical Perspective

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Abstract

Lexical bundles refer to a sequence of three to four words that recur frequently in corpus-based discourse, both written and verbal. The overt instruction of these often overlooked multi-word sequences can address specific difficulties that L2 writers struggle with in establishing a credible English academic voice in their writing and speaking. Pedagogical approaches to encourage students to use them as a part of their own writing repertoire include raising their awareness of how lexical bundles are used and scaffolding communicative exercises to practice their usage.

Lexical bundles of three to four words that recur frequently in speech or writing are identified empirically in corpus-based frequency patterns (Biber, 2006). Unlike other multi-word sequences or formulaic expressions that have been identified and studied by researchers, lexical bundles are not complete grammatical units and are not idiomatic in meaning. Nevertheless, because they are so common and perform definable discourse functions, it stands to reason that they are essential to the writing and the comprehension of academic prose. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the essential role of lexical bundles in academic writing and to explore strategies to enable second language (L2) students to expand their repertoire of academic rhetorical features to include these multi-word sequences. The exploration will be guided by three principle areas of research into L2 writing: namely the sociocultural context within which L2 writers are expected to perform, the assessment of L2 writing which inevitably looks at the common errors that students make and the writing processes involved in successful composition (Weissberg, 2005).

Key words: lexical bundles, academic writing, voice, discourse

Lexical Bundles

Lexical bundles are also referred to as “clusters” or “chunks” and are “extended collocations which appear more frequently than expected by chance, helping to shape meanings and contributing to our sense of coherence in a text” (Hyland, 2008, p. 41). According to Biber, Conrad and Cortes (2003), these multi-word expressions in academic prose often serve to bridge two phrases, either two noun phrases or a noun and a verb phrase. They may also introduce a dependent clause. In all of these roles, nonetheless, they function like scaffolding for new information (Biber & Barbieri, 2007). While Cortes (2006) divided the list of bundles that she taught her students into more well defined functional categories which is helpful pedagogically, Biber (2006) categorized them under three essential functional roles: stance expressions, discourse organizers, and referential expressions. For the sake of simplicity I will employ these 3 categories to further examine the use of these word clusters.

The following examples of italicized sentences (mine) feature underlined samples of lexical bundles taken from Biber’s (2006) list of common lexical bundles found across academic disciplines. According to his categorization, there are two functions of stance bundles: epistemic stance and attitudinal/modality stance. Epistemic stance bundles distinguish between what is factual, what is likely, and what is doubtful. They express degrees of certainty or probability, as in this example: *The disciplines of business and social science are more likely to use this lexical bundle than other disciplines.* This word sequence serves as a bridge between the noun phrase and the verb phrase.

Attitudinal/Modality stance bundles express the writer’s attitude towards the proposition that they introduce in a declarative sentence, as in this sentence: *It is possible to check the usage of these lexical bundles in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.* It is important to note that in written academic register, the stance expressions are always impersonal as this last example is, whereas in class, a teacher might say to the students: *You might want to check the usage of these lexical bundles in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.* Lexical bundles that express attitude toward ability or effort also fall under this category, as in this example: *Lexical bundles can be used to clarify our stance on a matter.*

Discourse organizing bundles introduce new topics, or signals that the topic will be elaborated on or clarified or that a point of contrast will be introduced, such as in this example: *With respect to the differences between lexical bundles and idiomatic expressions, such as ‘in a nutshell’, the former are not structurally complete while the latter are not used often enough to count as lexical bundles and are usually short noun phrases or prepositional*

phrases. Referential bundles refer to something that can be concrete or abstract in order to highlight it or to point out a particular attribute. They can also refer to time or place or to another text. *This lexical bundle is one of the most commonly used ones in engineering, social science, natural science and humanities*. In fact, this referential expression is found over 100 times per million words in the latter two disciplines (Biber, 2006).

To illustrate how prevalent lexical bundles are and how easily they can be identified, I made use of the textbook: *Academic Encounters Life in Society* by Brown and Hood (2005). This is an integrated skills course book designed for English for academic purposes (EAP). I skimmed through the reading comprehension passages which are all taken from authentic sociology texts and highlighted examples of lexical bundles. I then checked the frequency of their usage using the concordancer at Lextutor.ca and categorized the samples according to the three functional categories described by Biber (2006): stance expressions, discourse organizers, and referential expressions, in the following table:

I. Stance expressions	
A. Epistemic stance - Impersonal	
it is true that	<i>It is true that today nearly one billion people around the world do not have enough food, but opponents of the</i>
the result of	<i>doomsday theories say that famine is mainly <u>the result of</u> other social and economic factors – for example, war, poverty, and politics. (Brown & Hood, 2005, p. 215)</i>
for the most part	<i>For the most part, pupils are encouraged to work on-line from home. (p. 204)</i>
B. Attitudinal/Modality stance - Impersonal	
can be used to	<i>Such information <u>can be used to</u> build up a profile of your interests and habits. (p. 130)</i>
it is not surprising	<i>Given the large amount of time that children spend watching TV, <u>it is not surprising</u> that there have been many research studies on the effects...(p. 139)</i>

II. Discourse organizers	
it is estimated that	<i>It is estimated that by age 18, the average U.S. child born today will have watched some 10,000 to 15,000 hours of television. (p. 139)</i>
in the first place	<i>In the first place, the individuals in the crowd do not share clear expectations about how to behave and about what will happen. (p. 40)</i>
on the other hand	<i>The expressive crowd, on the other hand, has no goal. (p. 40)</i>
in other words	<i>In fact, children were seen as costly to educate, clothe, and feed – in other words, it was better economics to have a small number of children. (p. 215)</i>
III. Referential Expressions	
takes the form of	<i>Panic sometimes takes the form of mass hysteria. (p. 46)</i>
the extent of	<i>We do not yet really understand the extent of their impact on society. (p. 81)</i>
in the case of	<i>In the case of youth culture, the values of that generation may become dominant over time as the group grows older and takes power in the society. (p. 194)</i>
in the United States	<i>Recent surveys undertaken in the United States have revealed, for example that... (p. 130)</i>

Table 1: Examples of common lexical bundles found in sociology

I identified many more expressions which functioned like lexical bundles, but when I checked them using the concordancer, I discovered that they were not used often enough to show up in the search of the corpus. When we look at the above examples, it is evident that although many of these units of words can be eliminated from the sentence with the sentence still remaining grammatical, each lexical bundle plays an essential role in clarifying what is expressed. Without them, the sentence may be confusing or the significance of what is presented lost to the reader.

The Sociocultural Context of the Academic Voice

There are a number of ways that an awareness of lexical bundles can empower L2 writers who face the challenge of not only finding the right words to express their ideas, but also finding the best way to present those ideas to give the right impression. Academic writing involves creating what Ivanič (1998) calls a “discoursal self” (p. 336) and what Hyland (2004, p. 89) calls a “professionally acceptable persona” that will enable the writer to be true to himself or herself in terms of the content that is expressed and at the same time claim the right to be heard in the academic community by using socio-culturally appropriate language. For the most part, L2 writers find themselves having to interact in “discourses and practices [that] support identities which differ from those they bring with them” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 32), and so they are unaware of some of these socio-cultural expectations of academia. To address this predicament, writing teachers must help students understand the expectations of the readers, as well as become “familiar with the normative aspects of discursive practices” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 51).

This discoursal self, the writer’s *voice*, refers to the rhetorical forms and features that a writer chooses to make use of in creating the desired impression on the reader (Ivanic, 1998 and Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). The reader forms an opinion of the writer’s believability according to his or her perception of that voice (Matsuda, 2001). “This places language, or rather language that carries credibility, at the heart of learning to become a member of a disciplinary community” (Hyland, 2004, p. 109), since the future of the L2 writer in that community depends on his or her success in creating that voice.

That lexical bundles are intentionally used by professional academic writers to establish solidarity and to distinguish themselves as proficient writers is affirmed by researchers (Cortes, 2006). Moreover, it is important to note that the use of these expressions facilitate comprehensibility and can be substantially different across different registers and disciplinary communities as revealed in comparative studies. Thus lexical bundles play a significant role in helping students establish a credible academic voice in his or her chosen discipline.

Challenges L2 Writers Face in Constructing an Academic Voice

Expanding L2 students’ repertoire of rhetorical features by adding lexical bundles can address specific hurdles in their writing. Since the selection of grammatical content to be covered in a course can be based on known errors L2 writers produce (Ellis, 2006), findings from Mayor’s (2006) IELTS Research Program study are particularly pertinent to this discussion. Mayor argues that candidates, especially candidates from China, often score

poorly in the academic writing section because of two particularly salient traits. First, an inappropriate dialogic register is created by the overuse or misuse of the first and second personal pronouns where more formal stance and referential expressions are required. A student may write: *What you need to know is that lexical bundles are very useful.* However, it would be better to use an impersonal stance bundle and write: *It is important to know that lexical bundles are very useful.* Both sets of word sequence are commonly encountered in academic settings. The former is a personal attitudinal stance bundle that introduces a directive and is often used by instructors during office hours (Biber, 2006, p. 151). When used in formal writing by a student, however, it creates an inappropriate “hortatory” tone, a common problematic trait found in L2 writing (Mayor, 2006). Another alternative can be: *As we have seen, lexical bundles are very useful.* Though dialogic because of the use of *we*, analysis of academic corpus has revealed that the “inclusive *we* is heavily used to bind writer and reader together as members of a disciplinary in-group,” while the use of the second person *you* or *your* is rare (Hyland, 2004, p. 100).

It is interesting to note that most epistemic stance bundles used in oral classroom teaching are personal. For example, a teacher may say: *You don't have to look far to find evidence of the common use of lexical bundles.* This bundle is used 40-99 times per million words in classroom teaching and conversation, and over 100 times per million words in classroom management, office hours, study groups and service encounter (Biber, 2006, p. 151). In formal academic writing, it would be more appropriate to use an impersonal lexical bundle: *It is not necessary to look far to find evidence of the common use of lexical bundles.* However, because students generally are exposed to teacher talk more often than to formal academic writing (McCarthy & Carter, 1997, cited in Lingley, 2007), it is conceivable that L2 students learn and use the less formal expressions more readily. Hyland and Milton (1994) in their corpus study comparing the writing of Hong Kong students with UK students preparing to enter university similarly found that L2 learners demonstrated a range of difficulties in using epistemic markers correctly to express precise degrees of certainty and probability in the appropriate degree of formality.

The second observation highlighted in Mayor's study is that interrogative and imperative verb moods are used too frequently and inappropriately, again resulting in L2 writers sounding as if they are exhorting the reader or demanding the reader to take certain actions. For example, a student may write: *Why don't we use lexical bundles?* This is a common spoken discourse organizer, but the following formal discourse organizer would be more appropriate in academic writing: *Considering the extent to which lexical bundles are used by*

professional writers, making them a part of our writing would be a natural choice. Mayor speculates that these traits may be a manifestation of the L2 writers' lack of adeptness in presenting recommendations or arguments in formal discursive or persuasive writing. Perhaps training learners in organizing an essay according to the purpose of the assignment and making use of cohesive devices such as topic sentences, discourse markers and lexical chains is not enough. Students also need to understand how data and information generated and gathered by different academic disciplines are "rhetorically transformed into academic knowledge (Hyland, 2004, p. 89)", in other words, interpreted and presented according to the rhetorical norms of that community.

Putting Theory into Practice

When considering how lexical bundles can be taught in the classroom, we come to an intersection where grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing pedagogies meet. Ellis's survey (2006) of research into the teaching of grammar over the past 20 years has found support for the *explicit* teaching of how structural features work in a written text through consciousness-raising activities in order to facilitate the eventual development of *implicit* grammatical knowledge, where rules are internalized and used automatically or unconsciously. Cortes' (2004) study also clearly demonstrated that mere exposure to lexical bundles did not result in students acquiring the knowledge of how to use them. In accordance with this finding, therefore, L2 writers should be given a variety of opportunities to practise what has been brought to their attention in meaningful communicative tasks so that the knowledge can be put to use in the process of transformation from *competence* to *performance*, as defined by Krashen (1984, cited in Hirvela, 2004). We also find research supporting explicit teaching of rhetorical structures through reading with the dual purposes of facilitating reading comprehension and effective writing (Hirvela, 2004).

Students can be trained to proactively explore texts in order to mine for rhetorical features and to examine the choices that professional writers have made in response to their purpose for writing, as well as the context in which they are writing and the audience for which they are writing. Moreover, Hirvela calls attention to the significant fact that "when reading and writing in academic settings, students are primarily engaged in composing from sources...; that is, their writing is usually based on some type of reading (p. 140)." Thus it is vital that L2 students understand that the purpose of reading is not only to increase their knowledge in a subject matter, but also to enable them to make use of that knowledge in their writing, and that knowledge can include linguistic knowledge. Not only should reading and writing not be

taught separately, but Brown (1994) asserts that “the integration of the four skills is the only plausible approach to take within a communicative, interactive framework” (p. 219).

Taking all of these research based principles into account is important for any chosen teaching technique, and this is illustrated by Li and Schmitt’s (2009) report of a longitudinal case study in which they tracked one Chinese MA student’s acquisition of lexical phrases over a 10 month period. The student “reported academic reading as a particularly fruitful source of lexical phrases, with about one-fifth of her phrases coming from this single source” (p. 97), while the other source was the explicit teaching of these phrases in her EAP course, which she found far more helpful than corrective feedback on her writing from “native judges” (p. 92).

Text Analysis

First of all then, a method must be devised by which lexical bundles can be explicitly brought to the attention of the students. To do so, students can be guided through the process of a text analysis. Hyland (2004) argues that “consciousness-raising must involve a focus on texts” (p. 110). When teaching a particular genre’s essay organization structures, such as in a definition essay or a persuasive essay, providing students with models for text analysis is a good way to begin. Besides having students look at the purpose of the piece and how the points are structured and cohesion achieved, the lexical bundles employed can also be highlighted. In a short article, two or three bundles can usually be identified. The teacher can make use of a concordancer like Lextutor.ca to make sure that there is a list of sample texts that use them. Students can be encouraged to make a personal list of these multi-word sequences alongside examples of their usage with the aid of a concordancer, just like they would with new vocabulary words to facilitate easy reference when they do their own writing. “The purpose of these tasks is not to turn students into linguists, but to stimulate their curiosity and direct their attention to features of writing in their disciplines, enabling them to recognize both the choices available to them and their impact” (Hyland, 2004, p. 110).

Disciplinary Ethnographies

Students who are in EAP courses and who have not yet been accepted into a specific university faculty often have little personal identification with that community and may not be aware of the required language skills expected of its members. Without a clear sense of purpose, students may lack the motivation to proactively learn to use lexical bundles. It is

important to help them see that there is a continuum of linguistic and rhetorical practices used to create a persuasive voice that are preferred by the so-called hard fields of natural science and the soft fields of social science and humanities, as have been identified through corpus analysis (Hyland, 2004). Ivanič (1998) puts forward that “writer identity is one of many aspects of academic discourse practices which can be investigated” (p. 341), and she suggests that this can be done by having students conduct their own ethnographies to learn about what it will mean to be a member of a particular discipline. In pairs students can create a questionnaire to interview members of a faculty of their choice and then synthesize the information that they gather and write a report on their findings and present it to the class. This will be intrinsically motivating and will encourage students to set their own learning goals and develop autonomy (Brown, 1994). Ivanič (1998) suggests that students can ask their informants about: “spoken and written instructions they receive for writing their assignments, feedback they, and other students receive on their assignments, their text-books and recommended reading, and the way in which social relations are conducted in their departments (p. 342).” From samples of text and even student writing that are gathered, text analyses can be done. The student researchers may not be able to understand the contents of the text because of their lack of background knowledge in their field of interest, but they should be able to highlight the types of lexical bundles that are used to link ideas together.

Concept or Semantic Maps

Lexical bundles can also make the creation of concept or semantic maps more effective. Brown (2007, p. 187) recommends the use of content maps, or mind maps, as a pre-reading activity to introduce students to new concepts and to make clear the discourse structure they will encounter in the text. This technique can also be an effective post-reading tool to help students map the key arguments presented in a reading and to paraphrase the points in their own words as a step towards writing a summary of the text. This format is excellent for demonstrating the scaffolding function of lexical bundles to students. The teacher can create a partially completed map with the key arguments mapped from general to specific. Lexical bundles, which may or may not be from the original text, can be used to link the nodes containing the concept words and ideas. This will provide students with practice in using formal language to summarize even articles from magazines that may be written in informal language full of slang that is inappropriate for an academic paper. Below is a simple example of such a map:

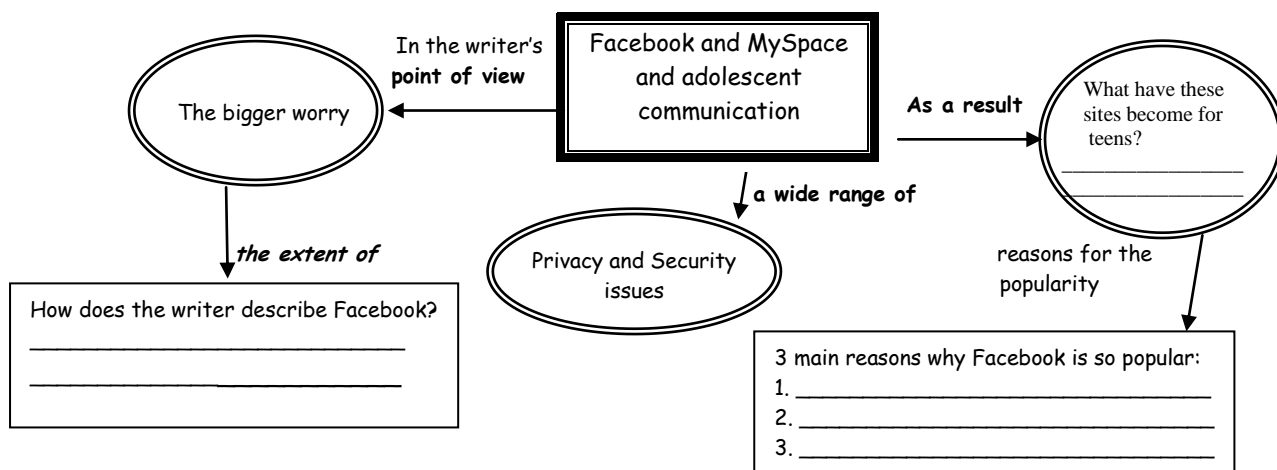


Diagram 1: *Semantic map with lexical bundles in bold*

Writing Sentences

A more direct practice is to have students write sentences in which they consciously make use of lexical bundles. Student can be given a set of lead sentences on current social issues or a set of social commentary cartoons or comic strips to which they are to respond with reflective sentences. From a list of lexical bundles, they choose one to use in constructing each responding sentence. However, before they make use of the given list of word sequences, they use Lextutor.ca to study examples of their usage. In this way, students are shown how to become responsible for their own language acquisition. Their work can be graded for content and grammatical accuracy. I have done this with a number of classes and have seen awareness increase and comprehension improve, and with more proactive students, a use of these lexical bundles in their own essays within the seven weeks that I have them for our intensive high-intermediate writing course.

Comparing Registers

A fifth technique can help students become aware of the differences between spoken and written academic language. Not only is there a difference in the use of clauses, the types of lexical bundles used also differ between textbook and classroom teaching registers (Biber, 2006). Brown (1994, p. 289) gives us the following pair of examples:

(1) "Because of the frequent ambiguity that therefore is present in a good deal of writing, readers must do their best to infer, to interpret, and to 'read between the lines.'

(2) There's frequent ambiguity in a lot of writing.

And so, readers have to infer a lot.

They also have to interpret what they read.

And sometimes they have to ‘read between the lines.’” [Underlining mine]

The register of the first example is quite clearly more formal. The second one is of less formal spoken language which is typically broken up into shorter sentences. It is useful to help students become aware of the differences by providing concrete examples. Some EAP listening textbooks provide students with authentic lectures to listen to in order to practice their note-taking skills. Transcripts from these lectures, often found in the teachers’ manual, can be analyzed by the students and perhaps summarized and written into more formal language with subordinating clauses and phrases introduced by appropriate lexical bundles. Students’ own presentations can be recorded and then transcribed, at least partially, to bring awareness to how students can express their ideas more clearly orally and in written form by employing different lexical bundles. Darren Lingley studied the use of what he identified as “prefabs or lexical phrases” that bring coherence and fluency to native speakers, and he argues that commencement speeches are excellent sources for students to glean such useful phrases to structure their own speech (2007, p. 9). There are L2 students who speak more fluently in English than they write, as well as many students who are able to write much better than they can speak. Some L2 writers may have developed their “inner speech” for writing separately from speaking and “may be able to access a highly developed English ‘voice’ when writing, but be unable to tap it when speaking” (Weissberg, 2005, p. 102). Perhaps this should not be surprising if, according to research, speech and writing make use of such different sets of lexical bundles to organize ideas.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented the use of lexical bundles in academic prose and how being aware of them increases our understanding of how an academic voice is negotiated by professional writers. Considering the challenges that L2 writers face in constructing their own persuasive voice and the argument that “academic writing does not involve mastering a set of transferable rules, but manipulating rhetorical options in ways that readers will find persuasive (Hyland, 2004),” I have proposed that it will be advantageous to explicitly raise student awareness of these often overlooked lexical bundles and have them practice using them in communicative writing activities. I have presented some pedagogical options that I have been exploring and this is only the beginning. There are yet few empirical classroom-based studies looking into the effectiveness of explicit instruction of lexical bundles, Cortes (2006) and Li & Schmitt (2009) being only two that I found, and while their results were tentative as to the extent of the benefits, they clearly showed that students do benefit.

Therefore, a variety of pedagogical approaches to teaching lexical bundles needs to be explored further with the view to effectively equipping students to read with comprehension and to write with persuasion.

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