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# TESOL

# Reporter

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# *TESL Reporter*

*A Forum for and by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*

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# Listening Practice for Improving Effectiveness of Spoken Communication

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Aural comprehension figures prominently in the field of second language acquisition. Indeed, at least one prominent theory—Krashen’s (1985) comprehensible input hypothesis—identifies comprehensible input, and to a lesser extent reading, as the most effective way to acquire a second or foreign language. Although Krashen (2003) has subsequently set forth an extensive body of research findings to support his theory, it seems unlikely that this will bring an end to the criticism that has been consistently leveled at this hypothesis in the literature (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Yet there are also instances of compelling evidence from more “independent” researchers that offer support for the efficacy of comprehensible input in second language acquisition. Lightbown, (1992) for example, conducted a study that compared the efficacy of a comprehension-based program—where young ESL learners only listened to and read English and had virtually no interaction with teachers or other learners—with a comparable, regular oral-aural ESL program. She found that the learners in the comprehension-based program learned English as well as, and in some cases better than, the learners in the regular program. To her surprise, she found that this applied not only to comprehension skills, but to speaking skills as well.

Against this backdrop, Celce-Murcia (1996) claims that of the four basic language skills, listening is the one we engage in the most, and when we do, we are mostly listening for discourse. While pointing out that the link between discourse and listening is all too often overlooked, she states:

Other experimental evidence (Anderson and Lynch 1988:16) shows that learners who have had sufficient and focused task-based experience as listeners are able at some later time to perform an oral communication task better than other learners who had only been given prior speaking practice (i.e. giving practice only in listening was more effective than giving practice only in speaking). One can safely assume that giving practice with both skills—first listening, then speaking—would be the best possible preparation, but if the teacher

does not have time to do both, then listening practice (with awareness-raising and analysis) should take precedence. (pp. 375-376)

For some EFL/ESL teachers this statement must surely elevate the relative importance of listening practice in the way they look at, plan, and manage classroom activities. However, the learners that Celce-Murcia identifies in relation to Anderson and Lynch's experimental evidence are not L2 learners—as her context would seem to suggest—but rather, native speakers. Anderson and Lynch (1988) state:

When we conducted communication experiments in which a speaker had to instruct a listener in drawing a diagram or in arranging a set of objects, we found that the most effective spoken performances came from speakers who had previously been listeners on a similar task. Experience as a listener was more beneficial than practice in the speaking role, as it seemed to highlight the needs of the listener for clear and explicit instructions. Many of these *native speakers* [italics added] failed to produce 'listener-friendly' messages without prior listening practice (Anderson, Brown, and Yule, 1984). (p. 16)

Although there does not appear to be any particular reason to assume that the same process would not apply to both L1 and L2 speakers, at least some indications suggest that listening comprehension can be affected depending on whether the speaker is native or nonnative (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2002). In short, there seems to be a gap in the empirical support in the literature for the particular claims that both Anderson and Lynch (1988), and Celce-Murcia (1996) make regarding the relative benefits of prior listening practice over prior speaking practice on a subsequent speaking performance. The question arises as to whether or not a study that involved L2 learners would give the same results as the study by Anderson, Brown and Yule (1984) that involved native speakers.

The study by Anderson et al. (1984), which was the basis for the observations by both Anderson and Lynch (1988) and Celce-Murcia (1996), was a series of three experiments that studied a number of variables thought to influence a speaking performance, such as the presence of a listener, the level of difficulty of the task, the academic level of the participants, and the relative benefits of prior listening practice over prior speaking practice as referred to above. The experiment involving the latter variable is the focus of the present study.

The experiment by Anderson et al. (1984) consisted of two experimental conditions, speakers and speaker/hearers (speakers with hearing experience); participants were randomly assigned to one condition or the other. Participants were seated back to back and the speaker gave instructions to the hearer on the rearrangement of certain objects or on how to draw a certain diagram. The hearer's role was simply to arrange the objects

or draw the diagram in accordance with the speaker's instructions. After a ten-minute break, they exchanged roles and repeated the procedure. The speaking performances of the participants were then scored, analyzed, and compared.

Scores for the speaking performances were based on noting instances of the use of five prescribed elements by the speaker to try and help the hearer replicate the arrangement of objects or draw the pattern that the speaker was describing. These five elements were the name of the entity, its color and size, and the relative directions and distances between them. The experimenters' main interest was to try to objectively measure "the speaker's appreciation of the information required by the hearer to complete the task in question" (Anderson et al., 1984, p. 28), rather than communicative effectiveness per se, which would have to take into account the outcome of the procedure and include an assessment of the hearer's comprehension performance. Thus, the scoring reflected the range of elements used by the speaker, one point for each element that was used, for a maximum of five points. Additional instances of the same element did not increase the score. They found that the speakers with hearing experience produced significantly higher scoring performances ( $p < 0.005$ ) than speakers who did not have the prior hearing experience, leading the experimenters to conclude that "speakers who were randomly assigned to the speaker or speaker/hearer condition performed reliably better in the latter condition" (Anderson et al., 1984, pp. 37-38).

Thus, apparently on the basis of Anderson and Lynch's (1988) subsequent claim that "experience as a listener was more beneficial than practice in the speaking role" (p. 16), Celce-Murcia concluded that "giving practice only in listening was more effective than giving practice only in speaking" (p. 375). Although Celce-Murcia gives the impression that this evidence is related to L2 learners, the original experimenters make it clear that the participants were native speakers, and there does not seem to be any evidence in the literature of any similar study involving L2 learners.

## Research Method

The aim of the present study was to investigate whether, in L2 communication, a previous listening activity was more helpful in the performance of a subsequent speaking task than a previous speaking activity. This could help us understand more about the relative significance of listening practice and speaking practice in the development of spoken communication ability among L2 learners. This study was based on one of the original experiments by Anderson et al. (1984)—the one that looked into the effects of prior listening experience compared with prior speaking practice on a subsequent speaking performance—but with three differences.

First of all, the participants were Japanese EFL learners instead of native speakers. Secondly, in their study, Anderson et al. (1984) are not explicit about the prior speaking practice of those in the speaking condition, and thus the present study sought to have an explicit speaking practice activity comparable to the hearing practice of those in the speaker/hearer condition. This entailed the addition of a third group and a third experimental session, as outlined below. Finally, for the purposes of convenience, there was a one-week interval between the experimental sessions rather than the 10-minute break in the original study by Anderson et al. (1984). While this additional time period could potentially lessen the extent of the influence of the two conditions under investigation (i.e., the effect of prior speaking practice compared to prior listening practice on a subsequent speaking performance), it should be noted that the same interval applied equally to both conditions.

In this investigation, the basic activity was the same in all three experimental sessions. Participants were put into pairs and each pair completed a diagram task similar to the original study, with speaker and listener seated back to back. The speaker was given a diagram and then gave instructions to the listener on how to reproduce this diagram exactly. The listener was directed not to ask any questions and to draw the diagram that was explained by the speaker. These speaking performances were recorded, scored, and then analyzed.

### **Participants**

The participants were 51 first-year students of the Faculty of Agriculture at Tottori University, Japan. Their average age was 18 years old. The number of males was 28, and females, 23. They constituted a convenience sample and were members of a general education English oral communication class that met for ninety minutes, once a week. Typically, the population from which this sample was drawn exhibits a fairly wide range of English ability as indicated by their TOEIC scores which are usually in the 350 to 650 range, averaging around 450. The particular abilities of the participants in each condition in this study are unknown, but they were randomly assigned to each experimental condition.

### **Procedure and Materials**

The procedure of the diagram task was based on the original study by Anderson et al. (1984). The participants were randomly assigned to three groups (A, B, and C), with each group composed of 17 participants. The study consisted of three sessions on three separate days, one week apart, with each group participating in two of these sessions as shown in Figure 1. However, it was only the second sessions of Groups A and B respectively that were intended to provide the data for analysis.



The participants were gathered in a room and given instructions, and then pairs of students went to a separate room to perform the experimental task, one pair at a time, while the rest continued with their regular weekly English lesson. The participants in Group A were the speakers in Sessions 1 and 2. The participants in Group B were the listeners in Session 2 and the speakers in Session 3. The participants in Group C fulfilled ancillary roles, first of all as the listeners in Sessions 1, to allow Group A to gain some prior speaking practice and secondly in Session 3, to allow Group B to give their speaking performance.

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Speaker	Group A ↓	Group A ↓	Group B ↓
Listener	Group C	Group B	Group C

*Figure 1: Research plan.*

First, participants were put into pairs as speaker and listener. The speaker was handed a card with a diagram on it, and the listener was given a white card and pen. The size of the white card was the same as the diagram card that the speaker had. The speaker was asked to give instructions to the listener on how to draw the diagram as accurately as possible, and the listener was instructed to follow the speaker's instructions and attempt to duplicate the diagram being described without saying anything. They sat back to back during the activity. The speakers were given one minute to prepare and after that they were given four minutes to complete the task. If they finished their explanation before the time was up, and said so, they could end the session. None of the pairs required the full four minutes to complete the task.

Figures 2-4 show the diagrams that were used in this experiment. The first diagram was used in Session 1, the second diagram in Session 2 and the third diagram in Session 3. All diagrams provided an opportunity for the speaker to refer to the five elements of entity, color, size, direction, and distance as employed in the original experiments by Anderson et al. (1984). In the study itself, the cards were in full color, without the color labeling that appears in the diagrams in Figures 2-4.

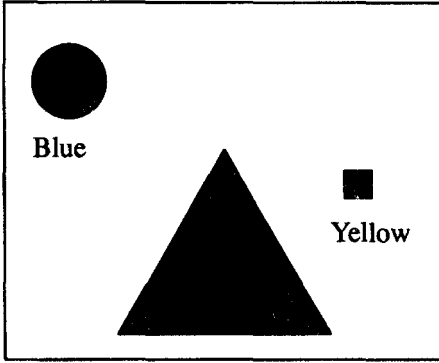


Figure 2: Diagram 1.

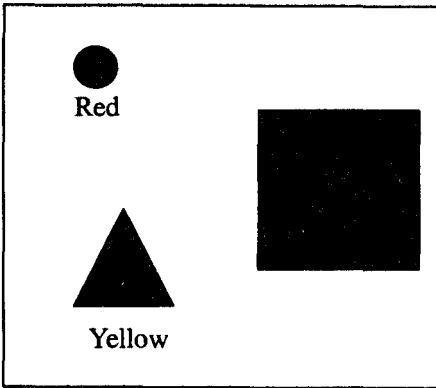


Figure 3: Diagram 2.

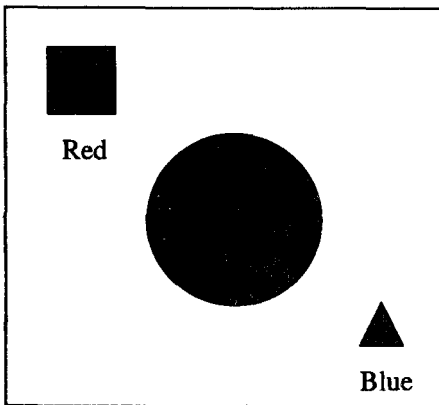


Figure 4: Diagram 3.

### Scoring and Analysis

For each session, the speaker's performance was recorded and later scored. The focus of attention was not on linguistic competence, but rather "the speaker's appreciation of the information required by the hearer to complete the task in question" (Anderson et al., 1984, p. 28) as in the original study. Thus, the same five elements, entity, color, size, direction, and distance, were used to score the speaker's performance, shown on the scoring card in Figure 5. For example, when a speaker used a directional term such as *under*, the speaker was given one point for the element of *direction*. Each element carried one point, so the maximum number of points was 5. In order to test for the possibility that the speaking performance of Group B in Session 3 was significantly better than that of Group A in Session 2, in terms of the utilization of the five elements, a t-test was used to compare the means of the total scores of the two groups to see if there was any statistically significant difference between them.

Date:	Group:	Name:
<b>Required Elements</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Score</b>
Entity	square	
Color	red	
Size	big	
Direction	under	
Distance	one centimeter	
Total Score		

Figure 5: Scoring card.

## Results

The difference between the means of the total scores of the second performances of Group A (whose first performance was speaking) and Group B (whose first performance was listening) was tested to see if it was statistically significant. The final number of participants in Group A was 16 (one student was absent in the second week and was eliminated from the study), and 17 in Group B. The results of the t-test are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Speaking Performance Comparison Between Group A and Group B*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Group A	16	3.7500	.4472	.969	31	.340
Group B	17	3.5882	.5073			

*Note:* N = number of participants; t = t-test score; df = degree of freedom; Sig. = significance level.

The mean of the scores of Group A's performances in Session 2 was 3.75, and the mean of Group B's performances in Session 3 was 3.59. The result of the t-test shows that the degree of significance is .340, far greater than the generally accepted .05 level, meaning that there was no significant difference between the relevant speaking performances of Group A and Group B. Therefore, the results suggest that the previous listening activity that Group B took part in was not necessarily more helpful in the subsequent speaking task than the previous speaking activity that Group A took part in.

However, a secondary investigation into other data that was collected shows some additional evidence to suggest that Group A and Group B did perform differently. Table 2 shows the difference in the average time of the speakers' performances during each of the three sessions in this experiment. The time for Group B is shorter than both of the speaking performances of Group A. The biggest difference is between the first speaking performances of Group A and Group B, a discrepancy of 55 seconds. And there is still

a 20-second difference between Group A's second speaking performance and Group B's. This suggests that Group B might have given a more efficient speaking performance, and if so, this may well have been because of their prior listening experience.

Table 2

*Difference in Time Taken by Groups to Complete the Speaking Task*

Group	Average Time
Group A 1 <sup>st</sup>	2 minutes 22 seconds
Group A 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 minute 47 seconds
Group B	1 minute 27 seconds

The pictures that the Group C listeners drew also provide some evidence of the relative communicative effectiveness of the relevant Group A and Group B speaking performances. In Session 1, Group A described their pictures to Group C, and in Session 3, Group B described their pictures to Group C. Thus in both cases, the same group did the drawings. One point of comparison is the number of drawings that exhibited signs of the five elements used in the scoring of the speaking performances described above. From most pictures it was possible to identify evidence of only four of the five elements: entity, color, relative size, and relative direction. Instances of distance were not readily discernable and thus distance as an entity was not considered in the comparison. Hence, the point of comparison adopted here was the number of pictures that exhibited signs of all four discernable elements.

As shown in Table 3, in Session 1, five students drew diagrams with four elements. In Session 3, eight students drew diagrams with four elements. Thus three more Group C members were able to draw pictures with four elements while listening to Group B descriptions than while listening to Group A descriptions. This apparent increase in performance on the part of Group C could have been the result of a practice effect, but

such an effect is probably limited to basic familiarity with the context and task of the experiment. The speakers in Groups A and B had no linguistic model to follow and gave highly idiosyncratic explanations to Group C. Given that participants were randomly assigned to Groups A and B, there is also no reason to suspect an underlying difference in language proficiency between these groups. In addition, these two sessions took place two weeks apart, the diagrams being described were different, and the sessions only lasted between 1½ and 2½ minutes in length, making it unlikely that Group C's second performance markedly benefited from their prior experience. Still, some degree of practice effect cannot be entirely ruled out and the extent of such an effect remains unknown.

Table 3

*Comparison of Group C's Two Drawing Performances*

Group	Pictures with Four Elements
Group A 1 <sup>st</sup> → Group C	5
Group B → Group C	8

**Time and Pictures**

Group B speakers explained the diagrams in a shorter time than Group A speakers, and at the same time, more Group C listeners drew diagrams with four elements based on these shorter explanations by Group B. Group B speakers seem to have been able to give more detailed explanations in a shorter time. This suggests that Group B gave more efficient and more effective explanations, most probably as a result of their previous listening experience. Thus, although the primary findings of this study do not offer support for the findings of Anderson et al. (1984) in terms of a significantly greater spoken use of the prescribed elements in their study, secondary evidence does suggest that previous listening experience may lead to more effective and more efficient explanations and therefore possibly to an increase in the speakers' appreciation of the information required by the hearer to complete the task.

## Conclusion

The results of this study appear to be inconclusive. On the one hand, no formal support was found for the notion that among L2 learners a prior listening experience provides better preparation for a subsequent related speaking task than a prior speaking experience. On the other hand, secondary evidence at least suggests that indeed a prior listening experience does seem to lead to a more effective and more efficient speaking performance. Obviously, additional research is needed, perhaps with several other L2 communities to determine whether prior listening activities might help improve later spoken performances.

In the absence of more compelling evidence, at the very least, it would appear prudent to view with caution the notion that when teachers may be faced with the choice between offering speaking practice or listening practice to their L2 students, they should give precedence to listening practice, as Celce-Murcia (1996) suggests. Thus, where time constraints may compel teachers to make a choice between listening and speaking practice, perhaps it would be wise for teachers to try to alternate between offering speaking practice and listening practice, rather than always giving priority to one or the other.

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*Trevor Sargent teaches EFL, EFL Theory and EFL Research at Tottori University, Japan.*

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## Conference Announcements

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**Qatar TESOL Conference.** April 14-15, 2006. "Best Practices in EFL," College of the North Atlantic, Doha, Qatar. Contact Jane Hoelker. Email: [jhoelker@qf.org.qa](mailto:jhoelker@qf.org.qa).

**Jordan Consortium of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers.** April 18-20, 2006. "Conference on Distinguished Language Studies," Jordan University & Yarmouk University. Contact Betty Lou Leaver, 784 Northridge PMB 293, Salinas, California, USA 93906. Tel: (831) 886-2486 or (962) 79-9759611. Fax: (831) 806-2486 or (962) 6-553-4761. E-mail: [Leaver@aol.com](mailto:Leaver@aol.com). <http://www.distinguishedlanguagecenters.org>.

**ATESOL NSW and Australian Council of TESOL Associations.** April 19-21, 2006. "Education for the Whole person: the TESOL Response," Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Contact Robert Jackson, DET Multicultural Programs United Level 14, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, New South Wales 2010 Australia, E-mail [robert.jackson@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:robert.jackson@det.nsw.edu.au). <http://www.atesolnsw.org>.

**National Chung Chen University.** April 22-23, 2006. International Conference on English Instruction and Assessment, Chiayi, Taiwan. Contact Ms. Tang, Department of Foreign Languages & Literature, National Chung Cheng University, 168 University Rd., Min-Hsiung Chiayi, 621, Taiwan, R.O.C. Tel: (886) 5-2721108. Fax: (886) 5-2720495. Email: [admada@ccu.edu.tw](mailto:admada@ccu.edu.tw). <http://www.ccunix.ccu.edu.tw/~flcccu/>.



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# Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: Causes and Consequences

**Meihua Liu**

Tsinghua University, P. R. C.

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Emergent since the 1970s, research in affective variables of second/foreign language teaching and learning has caught increasing attention in recent decades (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz, 1995; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Language educators have long recognized that learning a second/foreign language is not an abstract exercise of memorizing vocabulary and applying grammatical rules. The learner must also face the stress and ambiguities of communicating within the parameters of an unfamiliar culture.

Horwitz et al. (1986) found that adults who perceived themselves as reasonably intelligent and socially adept individuals often became doubtful and nervous when communicating in a second/foreign language due to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and sociocultural standards. Clinical experience, empirical findings, and personal reports attest to the existence of anxiety reactions with respect to language learning (Sparks, Ganschow & Artzer, 1997; Young, 1991; Zhang, 2001).

With a focus on Chinese undergraduate non-English majors in oral English language lessons, the present study aimed to identify causes for anxiety and coping strategies adopted by students and their teachers in EFL classrooms.

## Review of the Literature

Numerous empirical studies have shown that anxiety exists in almost every aspect of second/foreign language learning (Hillesson, 1996; Horwitz et al., 1986; Jackson, 2002; Kitano, 2001; Phillips, 1992; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Speaking publicly in the target language has been found to be particularly anxiety provoking, even for learners who feel little stress in other aspects of language learning (Horwitz, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). The speech of anxious students is often accompanied by blushing, trembling hands, a pounding heart, and headaches (Cohen & Norst, 1989). Anxious students are less likely to volunteer answers or participate in oral classroom activities (Ely, 1986). Some students with high levels of language anxiety may even have a mental block (Tobias, 1979). They also display avoidance behaviors such as skipping classes and postponing their homework (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002).

College students in the US used words such as “horrible,” “frightening,” “awful,” “resentment,” and “hated” to describe their experiences and feelings in foreign language (FL) classes (Price, 1991). They identified having to speak the target language in front of their peers, making errors in pronunciation, not being able to communicate effectively, and the difficulty of their language classes as the greatest sources of anxiety. In addition, two personality variables—desire for perfectionism and fear of public speaking—contributed to students’ anxiety in FL classes.

Consistent negative correlations have been found between foreign language anxiety and foreign language achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1991). In one study, high-anxious American students studying French were found to receive lower exam grades than their low-anxious classmates (Phillips, 1992). In addition, the high-anxious students demonstrated a negative attitude toward the oral exam. They reported going blank, feeling frustrated at not being able to say what they knew, being distracted, and feeling panicky. The finding that language anxiety has a negative effect on students’ oral performance has been further supported by subsequent studies (Aida, 1994; Kitano, 2001; Yan & Wang, 2001; Zhang, 2001).

Bailey (1983) examined the diaries she kept while studying French as a foreign language in a low-level college reading class in the US. Competitiveness caused her to compare herself to other students in the class, which aggravated her fear of public failure. The diaries revealed that she was uncomfortable and extremely anxious about the French class during the first few weeks. Her perceived inability to compete with other students was so strong that she withdrew from the study for a while. Nevertheless, her anxiety also drove her to work harder at times. Thus, the researcher concluded that competitiveness accompanied by anxiety both hindered and facilitated her French learning.

Awareness of performing badly in a second language (English) was related to a loss of self-esteem for international college students in Singapore (Hilleson, 1996). Evaluation by peers and teachers, self-consciousness about pronunciation, difficulty entering into conversations, comprehension ability, and fear of missing important information created anxiety. Anxiety was not as profound for reading and writing tasks. Similar to the Bailey (1983) study, in some cases, anxiety motivated students to work harder.

These findings indicate that anxiety is a serious problem in FL/SL classrooms and can be attributed to a complex set of reasons such as low self-confidence and self-esteem, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, and competition. However, the degree of and reasons for anxiety may differ according to context. For example, studies in Asian contexts reveal that one reason for Asian language learners’ anxiety is the fear

of losing face (Hilleson, 1996; Jackson, 2002). The need to explore FL/SL anxiety in wider contexts with different groups of learners motivated the present research, which investigated anxiety during oral English lessons in Mainland China with a focus on causes for and consequences of anxiety and coping strategies employed by the students and their teachers. To achieve this aim, a triangulated method was adopted and the following research questions were proposed:

1. To what extent do the students experience anxiety in oral English classrooms?
2. What is the impact of anxiety on students' classroom performance in oral English?
3. What factors contribute to student anxiety in oral English classrooms?
4. What strategies are employed to cope with anxiety in the classroom?

## Methods

This study reports part of a longitudinal investigation of students' reticence and anxiety in oral English classroom learning and testing situations.

### Participants

Three classes of first year students enrolled in English listening and speaking courses that met once weekly participated in the study. The courses represented three English proficiency levels.<sup>1</sup> Participants included 34 low-proficiency, 32 intermediate-proficiency, and 32 high-proficiency students. With an average age of 18.5, these non-English majors in a key comprehensive university in Beijing came from various departments such as computer science, architecture, management, and Chinese. Twenty students (six low-proficiency, seven intermediate-proficiency, and seven high-proficiency), and their three teachers participated in a semi-structured interview.

### Instruments

To investigate students' anxiety in English language classrooms, a triangulation of methods was adopted: survey, observations, reflective journals, and interview, as detailed below.

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<sup>1</sup> The students were placed into different band groups ranging from 1 to 3 (Band 1 being the least proficient and Band 3 the highest) according to their scores on the placement test upon entering the University. After a term's successful learning, students are automatically promoted to a higher band.

### *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale*

A 36-item survey adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), was translated into Chinese and administered to the students to measure their anxiety levels in English language classrooms. The survey was designed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' with the values 1-5 assigned to the descriptors respectively.

### *Background Questionnaire*

The background questionnaire was designed to obtain demographic data about the participants such as name, gender, age, and department.

### *Teacher Observation*

The teachers of the three classes were asked to keep a weekly record of the most and least anxious/reticent students in different classroom activities during the term.

### *Reflective Journal*

To gather additional data about personal and affective variables in language learning, the students were asked to write reflective journals on a weekly basis for six successive weeks. Students were given detailed prompts based on the following general topics: (a) past learning experiences and general feelings about speaking English; (b) participation in classroom activities and response to the teacher; (c) opinions towards classroom activities such as presentation, pair work, and group work; (d) factors contributing to reticence and strategies to become more active; (e) factors contributing to anxiety and strategies to reduce or overcome anxiety; (f) strategies to learn oral English and suggestions for language learners and teachers. In addition, the students could write about any experience related to their language learning.

### *Semi-structured Interview*

To get a more comprehensive view of anxiety in English language classrooms, two high-anxious, three average-anxious, and two low-anxious students at each proficiency level as well as their teachers were invited for a semi-structured interview. Questions for students covered such aspects as educational experience, personal experience, participation and level of anxiety in university English lessons, self-assessed English proficiency, reasons for feeling anxious, and coping strategies. To complement students' perceptions, interview questions for teachers included their identification of the most reticent/active, confident/anxious students in various classroom activities, general reasons for student reticence and anxiety, and coping strategies. In case the interviewees might have difficulty understanding the questions in English or did not like speaking English, the questions were translated into Chinese.

### *Classroom Observation*

To compare students' self-reports with teacher observations, the three classes were videotaped three times each during the term. Focusing on oral activities, the videotaped observations aimed to identify the students' levels of participation and anxiety in different classroom activities—pair work, group discussion, presentations, and answering questions—and examine their performance in oral English in those activities. Since pair work was the most common activity in all three classes, each student was videotaped at least twice when engaged in pair work. Nevertheless, not all the students were videotaped when performing other types of activities because they were not required in some classes.

### **Procedures**

The study was conducted during the first 14-week term of 2003-2004. The students started journal writing in the second week and wrote for six successive weeks with the topics distributed to them weekly. Students were required to write for only six weeks rather than the full term due to the added work the journals entailed. At the end of the term, 30 low-level, 31 intermediate-level and 32 high-level journals were considered complete and valid for thematic content analysis.

The teachers kept a record of the students' participation and level of anxiety in various classroom activities on a weekly basis from the second to the twelfth week. The students completed the FLCAS in class towards the end of the term. Interviews were held after the final oral exam. Each student interview lasted about fifty minutes and the teacher interviews lasted twenty-five minutes. Interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and audiotaped. Twenty students and three teachers participated in the interviews.

During the last two months of the term, the researcher videotaped each class three times for a total of 90 minutes, focusing on oral activities. The purpose of the videotaping was to obtain a general picture of what was happening in the class and examine individual students' performance in various activities. Each student was videotaped at least twice when performing an oral activity.

### **Data Analysis**

The mean, standard deviation, median, mode, maximum, minimum, and range were calculated from the survey results to determine to what degree the students felt anxious in oral English language classrooms. The interviews were transcribed, and with the journals and observations, were subjected to a thematic content analysis, which involves analyzing the overt communication behavior of a selected communicator (Krippendorff, 1980). Before analyzing the content of communications, the content is classified into

units, which can be word, phrase, sentence, syntax, proposition, and/or theme (Neuendorf, 2002).

Since the observations, reflective journals and interviews in the present research were conducted according to a set of purposes or key questions, they could be best analyzed according to thematic units. Based on the analyses, frequency and percentages related to certain themes were calculated to determine how many students felt anxious in a certain lesson, how many thought anxiety negatively affected their oral performance, how many believed that a certain factor contributed to their classroom anxiety, and so on.

### **Limitations**

Given the fact that this study was situated in a key comprehensive university in Beijing where students generally enjoy a better English learning environment and have more access to English and native speakers than those in many other places, the findings may not be generalizable to other EFL learning situations. Additionally, differences may exist regarding the complex nature of language learning, coupled with equally complicated individual factors, which require the issue of anxiety to be further explored in various contexts. In spite of these limitations, however, the study provides extensive insights into student and teacher views of anxiety, its effect on language learning in EFL contexts, and how it is currently being addressed.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study are next discussed according to findings related to each of the four research questions.

### **Anxiety Level**

Ninety-eight percent of the FLCAS questionnaires were completed and considered valid for statistical analyses. The total score of the FLCAS revealed the respondent's anxiety in oral English classrooms. The higher the score, the more anxious the respondent felt. Since the FLCAS comprises 36 items, the scores may range from 36 to 180. A total score of more than 144 signifies high anxiety, a score of 108 to 144 indicates moderate anxiety, and a score of less than 108 implies low anxiety in oral English classrooms. The statistical analyses of the FLCAS across levels, presented in Table 1, reveal that students at all levels were moderately anxious in oral English classrooms but that the more proficient in English the students were, the less anxious they felt.

Table 1

*Statistical Analyses of the FLCAS*

Level	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum	Range
Low	32	108.56	20.12	108.00	74.00	55	157	102
Intermediate	31	103.45	14.73	105.00	77.00	77	137	60
High	33	98	15.90	97.00	94.00	58	131	73

The students' level of anxiety reported on the survey was also supported by their self-reports in the reflective journals. As can be seen from Table 2, more than 70% of the students at each level reported feeling nervous or a little nervous when speaking English in class, mainly due to poor English and fear of making mistakes, as indicated in the following student journal excerpt:

I felt nervous every time I was picked to give a talk. If I am asked to speak English without preparation, maybe I can only speak out some easiest sentences. I have no confidence in my English, so I am afraid of it. (Feng, male, high-level)

Lack of confidence in their English and fear of losing face made some of the students anxious even when they were prepared. For instance, a high-level student commented, "I think I'm nervous when speaking English in front of others for the limited vocabulary that I have. So I can't express my real meaning exactly. I am always nervous whether I have prepared or not when speaking English" (Bao, male, journal). A few students were extremely anxious in the class and used words such as "horrible," "frightening," and "awful" to describe their feelings, similar to students in Price's (1991) and Phillips' (1992) studies.

As noted in Table 2, however, the more proficient students tended to be less anxious in English language classrooms. A smaller percentage of them (46.9%) reported being nervous compared to the low/intermediate-level students (70% and 64.5% respectively), and a larger percentage reported not being nervous at all (21.9% compared to 6.7% of the low-level students and 12.9% of the intermediate-level students). This trend holds

true for responses related to feeling nervous with or without preparation. There were also a couple of students at the low and intermediate proficiency levels who did not feel nervous whether prepared or not, mainly because of their strong self-confidence. “I won’t feel uneasy whenever I face any situation because I have a firm faith in myself, no matter whether I have prepared for it” (Lei, male, journal, intermediate level).

Table 2

*Student Anxiety Reflected in Journals*

		Nervous	A little nervous	Some-what nervous	Nervous even with preparation	Not nervous with preparation	Better with preparation	Not nervous
Level	Number	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)
Low	30	21(70%)	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	18(60%)	4(13.3%)	6(20%)	2(6.7%)
Inter-mediate	31	20(64.5%)	4(12.9%)	3(9.7%)	16(51.6%)	4(12.9%)	7(22.6%)	4(12.9%)
High	32	15(46.9%)	8(25%)	2(6.2%)	12(37.4%)	6(18.8%)	7(21.9%)	7(21.9%)

**Impact of Anxiety on Students’ Classroom Performance in Oral English**

When asked about the impact of varied levels of anxiety on students’ performance in spoken English, though one teacher interviewee was not sure whether it had any positive effect, none of them denied its negative effect. The high-level class teacher explained, “If a student feels nervous when speaking English to others, he doesn’t want to contribute much to the conversation. Thus, he has less practice and thus can’t improve his spoken English rapidly” (Female, interview).

Similarly, only one student at each level thought that anxiety was “not a bad thing for it can make you more strict with yourself. It will encourage you to perform much better” (Zhao, male, journal, high level). Another student believed that whether anxiety was good or bad depended on “one’s attitude toward nervousness” (Chuan, female, journal, low level). The majority of the students, however, believed that anxiety negatively affected their performance in spoken English. For instance, one high-level



student wrote, “Because of nervousness and anxiety, I can’t speak as well as I should and this makes me diffident. For example, I usually make mistakes in tense because of nervousness” (Zhen, male, journal). The students’ opinions toward the effect of anxiety are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Effect of Anxiety on Students Performance in Spoken English*

	Journal participants			Student interviews		
	Low (Total N=30) N(%)	Intermediate (Total N=31) N(%)	High (Total N=32) N(%)	Low (Total N=6) N(%)	Intermediate (Total N=7) N(%)	High (Total N=7) N(%)
Good effect	1(3.3%)	0	0	0	0	0
Bad effect	28(93.4%)	29(93.6%)	30(93.8%)	6(100%)	7(100%)	6(85.7%)
Can be good or bad	1(3.3%)	1(3.2%)	1(3.1%)	0	0	1(14.3%)
No Effect	0	1(3.2%)	1(3.1%)	0	0	0

As seen in the table, more than 90% of the students in each group, with the exception of the high-level interviewees, stated that anxiety had a negative effect on their performance in oral English. This is indicated in the following journal entry:

I think the effect is quite great. If you feel nervous when speaking English, your tone and intonation won't sound natural. And you can't fix your attention on thinking about how to express your ideas in English. Then you may not be able to recall the words and sentence structures you need. (Long, male, intermediate level)

In addition to immediate effects, anxiety negatively affected long-term performance. "If you feel nervous, you can't go on. If you can't go on, you don't want to speak any more. Gradually you are not willing to speak English. Thus, you can't improve your English" (Dai, male, journal, low level). This view was shared by students at all levels. Furthermore, they argued that confident students would gradually become better English speakers while anxious students would become less willing to speak the language and therefore speak poorer English.

In general, the students outlined the following outcomes of anxiety in the oral English classroom: (1) fear or hatred of speaking English; (2) inability to say something even on a very easy topic; (3) inability to think clearly; (4) reduced interest in English; (5) more mistakes; (6) stammering during a speech; (7) inability to recall learned words; (8) increased anxiety; (9) fewer chances for practice. Due to anxiety, many students chose not to speak English, which made it harder for them to improve their spoken English. A low-level student reported, "Because of nervousness, I spoke little English and my oral English didn't improve all the time" (Song, male, journal).

The negative effect of anxiety on students' performance in oral English is also confirmed by the correlation analysis of the students' FLCAS scores and their performance scores. The students' videotaped performances (i.e., participation in oral class activities such as pair work) were evaluated by two teachers according to the 15-point scale used by the Department of Foreign Languages at the university where the study took place. The scale measures students' ability to perform a communicative task, and considers features such as grammatical usage, pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. The average of the two scores comprised the final performance score.

The correlation was  $-0.377^{**}$  ( $p < 0.01$ ), which signifies that the FLCAS was significantly negatively correlated with the students' performance in oral English. The higher the students scored on the FLCAS, the worse they performed in oral English in the classroom. Namely, the more anxious the students were in oral English lessons, the worse they performed in class, which supports findings of previous studies (Aida, 1994; Zhang, 2001).

### **Causes for Anxiety in Oral English Lessons**

When asked about the reasons for student anxiety in oral English lessons, the participants invariably believed that it could be attributed to a range of factors such as

low English proficiency, lack of practice, difficulty of the task, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and incomprehensible input. The factors mentioned in student journals and teacher interviews are summarized in Table 4. (The causes described by the student interviewees were basically the same as those in their journals and thus are not listed.) The table indicates that the three main factors contributing to student anxiety in English language lessons, identified by students at all proficiency levels and by teachers, were lack of practice (70%, 67.7%, 75%, and 100% respectively), lack of vocabulary (50%, 51.6%, 53.1%, and 66.7% respectively), and low English proficiency (43.3%, 29%, 31.3%, and 66.7% respectively).

Table 4

*Causes for Student Anxiety in Oral English Lessons*

	Low (Total N = 30) N(%)	Intermediate (Total N = 31) N(%)	High (Total N = 32) N(%)	Teacher (Total N = 3) N(%)
Lack of practice	21(70%)	21(67%)	24(75%)	3(100%)
Lack of/limited vocabulary	15(50%)	16(51.6%)	17(53.1%)	2(66.7%)
Low English proficiency	13(43.3%)	9(29%)	10(31.3%)	2(66.7%)
Personality	13(43.3%)	9(29%)	8(25%)	1(33.3%)
Fear of making mistakes	9(30%)	13(41.9%)	6(18.8%)	1(33.3%)
Lack of preparation	6(20%)	4(12.9%)	10(31.3%)	2(66.7%)
Incomprehensible input	2(6.7%)	8(25.8%)	7(21.9%)	0
Inadequate grammatical knowledge	6(20%)	5(16.1%)	3(9.3%)	

Table 4 (continued)

*Causes for Student Anxiety in Oral English Lessons*

	Low (Total N = 30) N(%)	Intermediate (Total N = 31) N(%)	High (Total N = 32) N(%)	Teacher (Total N = 3) N(%)
Fear of being laughed at	2(6.7%)	8(25.8%)	3(9.3%)	1(33.3%)
Lack of confidence	5(16.7%)	1(3.2%)	8(25%)	1(33.3%)
Difficulty of the task	3(10%)	3(9.7%)	3(9.3%)	0
Poor/bad pronunciation	1(3.3%)	2(6.5%)		0
Lack of familiarity with partners/class-mates	0	3(9.7%)	2(6.3%)	0
Lack of familiarity with the topic	1(3.3%)	0	1(3.1%)	2(66.7%)
Fear of being negatively evaluated	3(10%)	0	0	0
Fear of being the focus of attention	0	3(9.7%)	1(3.1%)	0
Fear of speaking Chinese English	0	1(3.2%)	0	0
Inability to find proper words to express ideas	0	3(9.7%)		0

Table 4 (continued)

*Causes for Student Anxiety in Oral English Language*

	Low (Total N = 30) N(%)	Intermediate (Total N = 31) N(%)	High (Total N = 32) N(%)	Teacher (Total N = 3) N(%)
Inability to express oneself	0	0	2(6.3%)	0
Eagerness/ desire to speak English fluently	0	1(3.2%)	1(3.1%)	0
Poor memory	0	0	1(3.1%)	0
Lack of familiarity with the type of activity	0	0	2(6.3%)	0
Family communication pattern	0	0	1(3.1%)	0
Lack of familiarity with the environment	1(3.3%)	1(3.1%)	1(3.2%)	1(33.3%)
English is not the student's mother tongue	0	1(3.2%)	0	1(33.3%)

As reported in their journals and interviews, the majority of the students did not practice speaking any English in the middle school, which was strongly exam oriented. Most of them became used to working hard at written English while neglecting spoken English in order to get high marks on written exams. When they started to speak English in class at the University, it was unavoidable for them to become nervous, especially because the University did not offer them many chances to access spoken English either. As a high-level student described:

I think the bigger problem is practice. When we were senior high school students, our only goal is to enter a university. As the College Entrance Examination doesn't require spoken English, most students seldom practice speaking English in three years. I was one of them. Even after I entered the University, I still find that I have little time to practice. So my English is becoming poorer and poorer instead of making progress. As I didn't practice speaking English in the past few years, my pronunciation is poor. So I am afraid to stand up and give others my opinion. (Xia, female, journal)

This view was held by the majority of the participants. In addition, as a foreign language, English was seldom needed in daily life. These students had even less contact with English outside the classroom. This was worse for the science students, most of whom reported that they had "little time to study English" (Xiao, male, journal, intermediate level).

Another big obstacle was the lack of vocabulary, which made the students anxious when speaking English in class. As one participant remarked, "[Students] don't know how to express themselves, can't call the name of an object, act and so on. They don't know enough adjectives and adverbs to express their opinions" (Min, male, journal, intermediate level). Worse still, inadequate vocabulary made the students increasingly nervous.

For about one-third of the students at each level, anxiety was also due to their low English proficiency. This was vividly described by an intermediate-level student:

Because I don't think I speak English well, I am afraid of speaking English in any situation except when I am alone. Naturally, I am nervous when speaking English in front of others. I'd like to be killed better than to be asked to speak English without preparation. (Miao, male, journal, intermediate level)

More than 60% of the teachers held the same view because they often observed that nervous students spoke broken English.

The next three main causes for anxiety were personality, mainly introversion and shyness (43.3%, 29%, 25%, and 33.3% respectively), fear of making mistakes (30%, 41.9%, 18.8%, and 33.3% respectively), and lack of preparation (20%, 12.9%, 31.3%, and 66.7% respectively). Other factors varied and are noted in the table along with the varying weights assigned to them by students at the different proficiency levels.

Another factor evident in the reflective journals that may have contributed to anxiety was students' low estimation of their own English proficiency. Though all the teacher interviewees felt that the students of the 2003 class were the best in English so far at the University, students rated their own abilities moderately, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5

*Self-assessment of Overall English Proficiency and Spoken English*

Level (total No. of participants)		Advanced N(%)	Pretty Good N(%)	Good N(%)	Just so-so N(%)	Elementary/ poor N(%)
Low (30)	OE	0/0	0/0	7(23.3%)	2(6.7%)	21(70%)
	SE	0/0	0/0	3(10%)	2(6.7%)	25(83.3%)
Intermediate (31)	OE	0/0	0/0	13(41.9%)	0/0	18(58.1%)
	SE	0/0	0/0	6(19.4%)	0/0	25(80.6%)
High (32)	OE	0/0	1(3.1%)	25(78.1%)	3(9.4%)	3(9.4%)
	SE	0/0	2(6.3%)	11(34.4%)	3(9.4%)	16(50%)

Note: OE → Overall English Proficiency; SE → Spoken English proficiency

None of the students, even those at the most proficient level, rated their overall English or spoken English as advanced. As can be seen from the table, except for 78.1% of the high-level students who considered their overall English proficiency to be good, fewer than half of both the low/intermediate-level students rated their English ability as good. The majority of them rated it as poor or elementary. The ratings of spoken English proficiency are even more conservative. More than half of the students at each level (70%, 83.3%, and 50% respectively) assessed their spoken English proficiency as poor or elementary. Furthermore, 18 out of 20 interviewees said that they were not successful in learning spoken English given the time and effort they had put into it.

On the other hand, most students desired to use English as naturally as a mother tongue or as perfectly as a native speaker. Only then did they think they were successful in learning English and could be confident speaking English in class. A low-level student stated, "We should be able to express ourselves in English very fluently and use the exact words to express the ideas" (Dai, male, journal). Like the participants in

Price's (1991) study, this pursuit of perfection irritated and upset the students, who became less confident and more reserved due to the fear of making mistakes.

### **Strategies Adopted to Cope With Anxiety in Oral English Lessons**

As described above, many students felt anxious during oral English lessons and thought that anxiety negatively affected their oral performance. In order to make the students feel more comfortable in class, all the teacher interviewees tried their best to be friendly and nice to the students. They intentionally set more time for pair work so that the students could become familiar with each other and get used to speaking English. Besides, they recommended learning methods and introduced conversation skills to the class in the first lesson. Meanwhile, they avoided embarrassing the students when they made a mistake. Instead, they tried to help them in a comfortable way. For example, the intermediate level teacher waited to point out and correct students' mistakes until the whole class became familiar with each other. She explains:

At the beginning of the term, if a student made a mistake in his speech, I generally didn't interrupt him. Instead, I commented on that after he finished his talk so that the students felt freer to speak English in class. As we got more and more familiar with each other, I might interrupt and urged the student to correct his mistakes if he made any. (Female, interview)

In addition, some of the teachers tried to create opportunities for the nervous students by asking them to read texts or answer simple questions in class. They also intentionally praised them even if their performance was not quite satisfactory. Nevertheless, because of the large class size and limited contact between the students and the teacher, the teachers could hardly do more than encourage the students to become less nervous and more confident with the help of routine expressions such as "Don't be nervous," "Don't be afraid of mistakes," and "Take the chance and you'll speak better and better." As a result, they hoped that the students would practice more to alleviate anxiety when speaking English to others.

The students, on the other hand, seldom intentionally took any measures to reduce anxiety during the term, as reported in their journals and interviews. A few students tried to tell themselves, "Don't be nervous, don't be nervous," at the beginning of a talk, but this was ineffective. An intermediate-level student reported, "After I stopped saying, "Don't be nervous," I immediately became nervous and more and more nervous as my speech went on" (Shuo, male, interview). Meanwhile, they offered some suggestions for English teachers and fellow students. All of them indicated that they would become less nervous when speaking English if the teachers could prepare interesting topics, create a relaxing classroom environment, encourage them to speak, and give them more chances



to practice speaking. All the participants commented that they should have more practice, be more prepared, and not fear making mistakes in order to become confident when speaking English. "In order to overcome anxiety, one should get rid of his fear of making mistakes first. Everyone makes mistakes. If you say something wrong, don't feel ashamed, just correct it and go on speaking" (He, female, journal, high level). In addition to not being afraid of making mistakes, students suggested telling themselves, "I can do it, I can manage it" (Zhao, male, journal, high level) in order to be more self-confident. Moreover, exposure to English was also viewed as critical:

As a student, they can expose themselves to English as much as possible. In one way they can improve their English. In other way they will get used to the pure English environment. These will make them overcome anxiety and become more confident and active. (Cai, male, journal, high level)

## Conclusions and Implications

In light of the results, several conclusions can be drawn about anxiety in Chinese EFL classrooms. At least one-third of the students at all proficiency levels self-reported feeling anxious in oral English lessons, though most were only moderately nervous. Others became so tense that their mouths or legs were shaking. This anxious feeling made many students unwilling to volunteer to speak English in class.

Concerning the impact of anxiety on the students' oral performance in class, the majority of participants believed that anxiety detrimentally affected their performance in oral English, which was further supported by the negative relationship between the students' FLCAS scores and their performance scores. Most of the students thought that the more confident students would gradually speak better English.

A range of factors was revealed to contribute to anxiety such as low English proficiency, lack of practice, personality, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, competition, and lack of confidence. Low self-estimations of ability may have also contributed to anxiety. Nevertheless, when confronted with anxiety, neither the teachers nor the students seemed to have effective coping strategies. Except for routine speech such as "be brave" and "take it easy," the teachers encouraged the students to become less anxious by suggesting more practice to build self-confidence. The students hoped their teachers would take measures to help them become more confident such as creating a friendly classroom atmosphere and providing interesting topics and practice time for speaking English.

The results of this study indicate that anxiety is a serious issue in Chinese EFL classrooms and is not yet being addressed by many EFL teachers and learners. To help

students become confident users of English, EFL teachers must be aware of the existence of anxiety in classrooms and make students aware of it as well. Secondly, since many students did not have much exposure to spoken English before entering the University, it might be beneficial for EFL teachers to state course objectives and introduce communicative language teaching to their students. In this way, students may have a better idea of their roles, thus consciously becoming more active and less anxious to use the target language to fulfill the course objectives, as recommended by Jones (1999).

Moreover, as found in the study, when students were not familiar with the English learning environment (especially the classroom environment), they were less willing to speak to others and felt anxious when doing so. Thus, as suggested by Donley (1998), EFL teachers have the responsibility to help students become familiar with the new environment. In addition, to help students become less anxious and more willing to speak the target language in oral English lessons, teachers need to create a relaxing and supportive classroom environment so that students' interest in and motivation to speak English may be enhanced, as suggested by the participants in the present research and previous studies (Horwitz et al., 1986; Yan, 2003). It would also be helpful for EFL teachers to explain to their students that it is unavoidable for a second/foreign language learner to make mistakes and that it is extremely difficult to speak English like a native speaker in a short time (Price, 1991). These practices would help students set achievable goals.

This study clearly establishes the reality of anxiety and its detrimental effects in EFL classrooms. It also identifies causes for anxiety and demonstrates the limitations of existing coping techniques. Considering the importance of spoken English and the common existence of anxiety, further research is needed to study its effects on language learning and identify coping strategies to help students become more confident and active EFL/ESL learners both in and outside classrooms, thus ultimately promoting their learning of oral English.

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# The Attitudes of ESL Students Towards Nonnative English Language Teachers

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Although no reliable statistics are available on the number of English language teachers worldwide, there is little doubt that the majority of them are nonnative speakers of English. Over the past few years, issues relating to Nonnative English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) have received increasing attention in the field of English language teaching. In fact, TESOL, Inc. now has a caucus focused on NNEST issues.

Research about NNESTs is a recent phenomenon. This may be due to the unusually sensitive status of these teachers, silently viewed as second in knowledge and performance compared to Native English Speaking Teachers of English (NESTs).<sup>1</sup> While the authority of the native speakers is accepted as the norm in English speaking countries, there appears to be power struggles between expatriate NESTs and local NNESTs in non-English speaking contexts (i.e., see Canagarajah, 1999). Until recently, NNESTs may have been a topic too politically incorrect to be studied and discussed openly.

Despite the pioneering work of Medgyes (1992, 1994), which was conducted in Europe, it took nearly a decade for more research to emerge on issues relating to NNESTs, especially in North America. This paper describes a longitudinal study of ESL students' attitudes towards NNESTs.

## Background

A few studies, notably those of Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) and Inbar (2001), have investigated the self-perceptions of Nonnative English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). Research on students' attitudes towards these teachers, at least as crucial as NNESTs' self-perceptions, has a more recent history.

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<sup>1</sup>This may have originated with the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language, held in 1962. One of the key tenets of the conference was that "the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker" (see Phillipson, 1992).

One of the earliest studies, Liang (2002), conducted at California State University in the US, was designed to investigate the attitudes of ESL students towards the speech of ESL teachers. The students listened to audio recordings delivered by six teachers and ranked the teachers' accents according to a scale of preference. Five of the teachers were NNESTs from different language backgrounds and the other was a Native English Speaking Teacher (NEST). Results showed that although the students rated pronunciation/accent in the teachers' speech as very important, they held generally positive attitudes toward these teachers, and believed that pronunciation/accent was not as relevant as they had first thought. Further, professional features depicted in the teachers' speech, such as "being interesting," "being prepared," "being qualified," and "being professional," played a role in the students' preference for teachers. In conclusion, Liang suggests that instead of focusing on ESL teachers' language background, the discussion on NNESTs should focus on their level of professionalism.

Although a large number of NNESTs work in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, many more teach in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). However, there appears to be a dearth of research into students' attitudes towards NNESTs in EFL contexts. To date, Cheung's (2002) research conducted in Hong Kong appears to be the only such study. Cheung's objectives were to determine the attitudes of university students in Hong Kong towards NESTs and NNESTs, the strengths and weaknesses of these teachers from the perspective of students, and the capability of these teachers in motivating the students to learn English. She also attempted to determine if there was any discrimination against NNESTs.

Cheung (2002) triangulated her data collection with the use of questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and post-classroom interviews. The respondents were 420 randomly selected undergraduates from a variety of majors at seven universities in Hong Kong, and 22 university English language teachers. About 60% of these teachers were NESTs, and nearly 90% of them had lived in Hong Kong for more than 6 years. Results showed that high proficiency in English, the ability to use English functionally, and an awareness of the cultures of English speaking countries were the strengths observed in NESTs. For NNESTs, the ability to empathize with students as fellow second language learners, shared cultural background, and the emphasis they placed on grammar were seen as strengths. As for teacher competency, both students and teachers stated that English language teachers, irrespective of NEST or NNEST status, should be well-informed about the language, able to make learning relevant and fun, good at motivating students, able to encourage independent learning and thinking, sensitive and responsive to students' needs, and able to respect students as individuals with their own aspirations. Not all students and teachers were of the opinion that there was discrimination against NNESTs in Hong Kong.

Another study into students' perceptions was conducted by Mahboob (2004) at Indiana University in Bloomington in the US. Mahboob examined students' perceptions of NNESTs using the novel and insightful discourse-analytic technique, asking 32 students enrolled in an intensive English program to provide written responses to a cue that solicited their opinions on NEST and NNESTs. Four readers coded and classified the students' comments according to linguistic factors, teaching styles and methodology, and personal factors. The analysis of these comments showed that in the case of NESTs, the majority of positive comments related to oral skills, with vocabulary and culture also being viewed positively. Negative comments on NESTs were related to grammar, experience as an ESL learner, ability to answer questions, and methodology. In the case of NNESTs, experience as an ESL learner earned the most number of positive comments, followed by grammar, affect, oral skills, methodology, hard work, vocabulary, culture, ability to answer questions, and literacy skills. NNESTs received negative comments with regard to oral skills and culture.

In ESL contexts, most English language programs are self-funded, depending almost entirely on the number of fee-paying students they enroll and in their ability to retain these students. In the US, for example, more than 570,000 international students are enrolled in colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2004), and a significant number of these students take courses in Intensive English Programs (IEPs), either in preparation for university entrance or as a supplementary requirement for degree study. However, a study by Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, and Hartford (2004) showed that the proportion of NNESTs in these IEPs is startlingly low. In the 118 IEPs surveyed, fewer than 8% of the teachers were NNESTs. Nearly 70% of the program administrators indicated that the "native English speaker" criterion was a factor in hiring decisions. The administrators' hiring practices, in turn, could reflect the perceived preferences of international students for NESTs. This preference, although unsubstantiated by research, prevails in EFL contexts.

Hence, more studies on the attitudes of ESL students towards NNESTs appear to be needed. Do NNESTs have a place in IEPs? Do ESL students have a preference to be taught by NESTs? Although the studies by Liang (2002), Cheung (2002), and Mahboob (2004) provide useful information on ESL students' perceptions of NNESTs, they provide little insights on the students' attitude changes after being taught by these teachers. The study reported in this paper attempts to fill this gap and was thus guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and expectations of ESL students at the beginning of the semester towards NNESTs?

2. What teacher and student variables influence the students' attitudes towards their teachers at the beginning of the semester?
3. How do time and exposure to NNESTs influence the students' attitudes to these teachers?

## Method

### Participants

The study was conducted at the English Language Center (ELC) of a major university in Utah, in the US. During the semester in which the study was conducted, 88 students were registered in the seven classes taught by four NNESTs. The students came from 21 countries with the majority being from Asia (41.23%) and Latin America (32.98%). The participating students were in their first, second, or third semester at the ELC, a semester being 14 weeks. The ELC has six levels, Level 1 representing the lowest proficiency level and Level 6 the highest proficiency level. Nearly half of the participants (46.6%) were at level three, 15% were at Level 4, and 38.4% were at Level 5. No students from Levels 1, 2, or 6 participated because no NNESTs were teaching at these levels. The students' ages ranged from 17 to 53, with 34.5% of them being between the ages of 17 and 20. As for gender, 42.9% of the students were males and 57.1% females.

Although they were not research subjects, a brief introduction to the four NNESTs whose students participated in this study is relevant here. Their pseudonyms are related to their country of origin: Mr. J. was from Japan, Ms. A. was from Argentina, Ms. S. was from Switzerland, and Ms. E. was from Ecuador. All had been teaching at the ELC for more than one semester. The first three were teaching grammar classes, while the latter, Ms. E., was teaching two listening/speaking classes. The teaching experience and English backgrounds of these teachers varied but all four had TESOL degrees and had been living in the US for more than three years.

### Instruments

The questionnaire used for this study was based on a review of the literature, current literature on attitude survey research (Brown, 2001; Schuman & Presser 1996; Weisberg et al., 1996), and a questionnaire used by Fox (1992) in her study of undergraduate opinions and attitudes towards international teaching assistants at a US university. Additionally, a pilot study that included 34 students and two NNESTs provided feedback on the appropriateness of the questions.



The questionnaire contained three distinct sections to measure the dependent variable, students' perceptions of their NNESTs; demographic information (first language of the students, age, etc.); opinions about and past experiences with NNESTs in general; and questions about the students' current teachers. All non-demographic items had a five-point Likert scale response format (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to provide the participants with a single frame of reference in choosing their answers (Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996).

To ensure comprehension, the questionnaire was translated into the five languages spoken most commonly at the ELC, namely Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin), Portuguese, Korean, and Japanese. However, because of the small number of speakers of languages such as Armenian, Arabic, Thai, German, French, and Mongolian, the questionnaires were not translated into these languages. Consequently, 10 of the 97 questionnaires gathered were filled out in English.

### **Procedures**

Once permission was granted by school administrators and teachers' consent was obtained, two questionnaires were administered to students. The initial questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the semester and the final one was given at the end of the semester, so that the effects of time, if any, would emerge more clearly. To ensure anonymity, the questionnaires were administered by an outsider, and individual teachers did not have access to the data collected.

At the beginning of the semester, 97 completed questionnaires were collected, and at the end of the semester, 95 questionnaires were collected since some students were transferred to different classes or had left the ELC. Similarly, since the ELC students are usually taught by four different teachers every day (NESTs and NNESTs), a few students filled out the questionnaires twice. Because of these small numbers, the significance level of the  $p$  value was set at  $<.05$ .

### **Analysis**

The initial questionnaire was first analyzed to obtain frequencies and percentages for every question using the multiple choice and Likert scale formats. Then, ANOVAs were applied to determine how much of the variations within the means could be attributed to the different variables (gender, first language, etc.). Finally, results on the initial and final questionnaires were compared with a  $t$  test to look at the probability for two means being the same on matched questions, and to analyze the influence of time and exposure on the responses of the students.

## Limitations

One major limitation of this study is the narrow range of ESL learners represented by the participants. Since only one school participated in the study, not all levels of proficiency were represented and some language groups were much smaller than others. Similarly, only four nonnative teachers participated, who were quite similar in their English proficiency, training, and teaching experience. Had these been more diverse, the influence of variables such as the accent or the appearance of the nonnative teachers could have been studied more precisely. Finally, although the participating teachers had not seen the questionnaires used for this study, they knew what the study researched. There is thus a possibility that their teaching methods might have been influenced by the study.

## Results

The results are classified according to the three research questions.

1. *What were the attitudes and expectations of ESL students at the beginning of the semester towards NNESTs?*

The attitudes and expectations were overall very positive. On the first day of class, a total of 68.6% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they could indeed learn English just as well from a NNEST, while only 11.63% disagreed and 3.49% of the students strongly disagreed with this statement.

Furthermore, 73.17% of the students disagreed with the statement that “NNESTs have difficulties understanding and responding to their students,” and only 7.3% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that it would be better if NNESTs were “not allowed to teach ESL.” In addition, 82.14% of the students agreed that “NNESTs have as much authority in the classroom as NESTs,” while only 5.95% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

At the same time, 79.28% expressed admiration and respect for their NNESTs, and as many as 84.34% of the students expected their class with NNESTs to be a positive experience in general. When asked, on the first day of class and without really knowing their teacher, if they respected their new teacher, a total of 79.27% of the students agreed or strongly agreed and only 7.22% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Although 78.57% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that having a NNEST was a good opportunity to learn about the different cultures of the world, 39.02% did not agree with the statement that NNESTs knew as much about the culture of the US as NESTs, and 35.37% responded that they were unsure about NNESTs’ knowledge of US culture (see Figure 1).

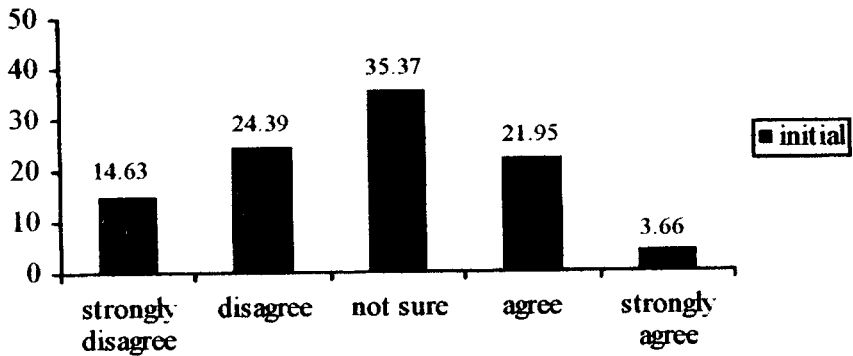


Figure 12: “I think that NNESTs do not know as much about the US culture as NESTs” (initial n=82; final n=80)

Similarly, when asked if they would recommend this teacher to one of their friends on the first day of class, 56.79% answered that they would, 40.74% said that they were not sure, and only 2.46% said no. Finally, to the statement “I expect this class to be a positive experience in general,” 84.34% of the students agreed or strongly agreed, 12.05% said that they were not sure yet, and only 3.61% disagreed. Likewise, to the statement, “I feel that this teacher will be a good teacher for me,” 74.08% of the students agreed or strongly agreed, 23.46% said that they were not sure yet, only 2.47% disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed.

2. *What teacher and student variables influenced the students’ perceptions of their teachers at the beginning of the semester?*

Because the reactions of a Japanese student to a Japanese teacher would probably differ from that of a Mexican student (due to factors such as common ethnic identity, familiarity with accents, and shared culture), two variables that were judged to have a possible influence on the results were identified: the first language of the students and that of the individual teachers. These variables were introduced into the analysis of the responses to all the questions of the initial and final questionnaires. Caution must be used when looking at these results since not all language groups were the same size.

<sup>2</sup>Only the answers that are statistically significant (*p* value: <.0001) are discussed here.

*First language of the students.* When looking at how students from different language groups answered individually, it was noticed that Korean students had a tendency to express negative feelings toward their NNESTs more frequently than other language groups.

To the statement “A NNEST has as much authority in the classroom as a NEST,” the answers given by various language groups were significantly different (see Table 1). The Korean students disagreed with the statement significantly more than the other groups, in particular the Portuguese-speaking students, who very strongly agreed.

Table 1

*Means Per Language Group on “A NNEST Has as Much Authority in the Classroom as a NEST” (N = 83)*

Language Group	Mean	Standard Error
Portuguese (Brazil)	4.95	0.26
Japanese	4.88	0.21
Spanish	4.76	0.15
Chinese	4.45	0.31
Korean	2.68	0.23
Other Languages	4.05	0.25

*Note:*  $p$  value <.0001

Responses to the statement “I respect and admire this new teacher because he/she is a NNEST,” indicated that again, the views of the Korean students were significantly more negative than those of other language groups (see Table 2). Interestingly, the Japanese more often displayed a stronger similarity of opinion with the Latin speakers than with their Asian counterparts, the Chinese or Koreans.

Table 2

*Means Per Language Group on “I Respect and Admire this New Teacher Because He/she is a NNEST” (N = 81)*

Language Group	Mean	Standard Error
Chinese	4.55	0.37
Japanese	4.47	0.23
Spanish	4.46	0.17
Portuguese	4.20	0.29
Korean	2.71	0.26
Other Languages	4.16	0.27

*Note:*  $p$  value <.0001

The responses to the statement “I expect this class to be a positive experience in general” are also interesting. The  $p$  value of <.0031 and the means again show that the Chinese (mean: 3.11) and the Koreans (mean: 4.00) were far more hesitant about their teachers than the Spanish (mean: 4.59), the Japanese (mean: 4.59), and the Portuguese (mean: 4.37) who were very positive already.

*Differences between the teachers.* It seemed important to verify if the students had generalized feelings towards all NNESTs in general, or if they would make judgments based on individual differences of the teachers. However, overall, responses were not significantly different depending on their teacher, except on three particular questions about respect (the two Spanish-speaking teachers gaining the most respect), accent, and appearance (Mr. J. being recognized as having the strongest accent and most foreign appearance).

When the students were asked if they admired their teacher because he or she was a NNEST, the  $p$  value of <.0057 indicates that students in different classes differed slightly in their responses, with the students of Ms. E. (mean: 4.60) and Ms. A. (mean: 4.13) agreeing strongly with the statement and the other students being more unsure.

3. *How do the variables of time and exposure to NNESTs influence the students' perceptions of their teachers?*

The variables of time and exposure did not seem to make much of a difference, as can be seen in Figure 2, even though the responses to some questions were significantly different at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

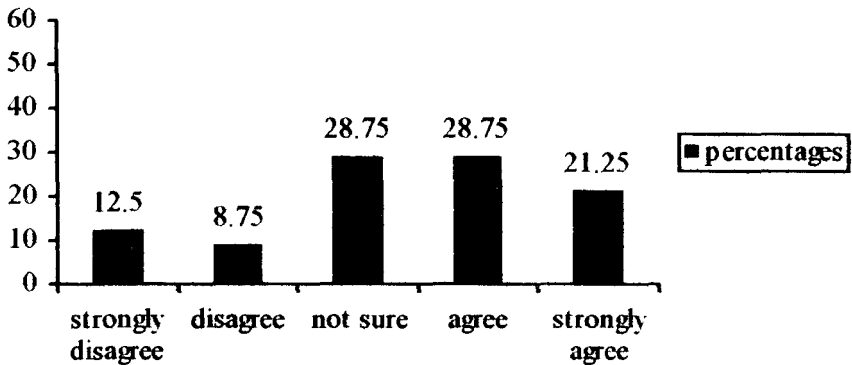


Figure 2: “My feelings towards my NNEST have changed during the semester.” (N = 80)

This lack of significant change over time may be due to several factors. First, the participating students already had positive opinions of their teacher at the beginning of the semester and in this case, it is good that their opinions did not change. For example, the answers to the question “I expect this class to be a positive experience” were already very positive at the beginning of the semester (54.22% of the students strongly agreed), and showed only a very slight (but still positive) increase at the end of the semester as evidenced by answers to the question “This class was a positive experience” (55.56% strongly agreed).

A similar pattern appeared on the question “I feel that this teacher will be a good teacher for me,” and “I feel that this teacher was a good teacher for me” (see Figure 3).

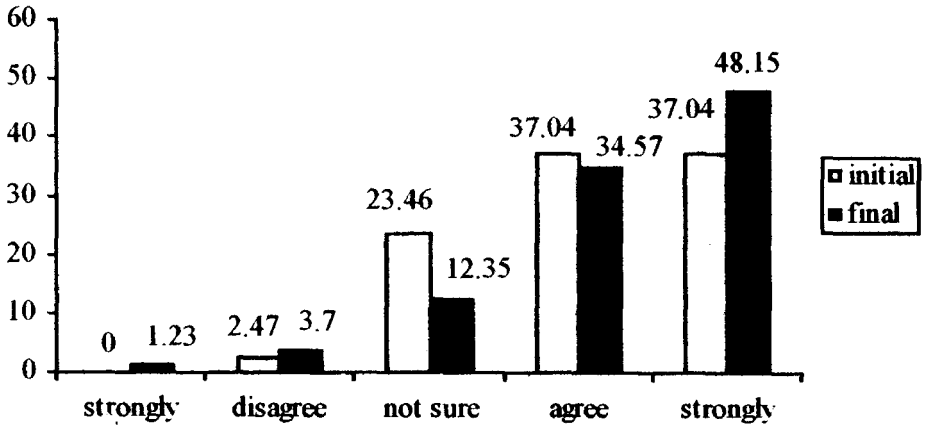


Figure 3: “I feel that this teacher will be a good teacher for me” (N = 81) and “I feel that this teacher was be a good teacher for me.” (N = 81)

Even if not strongly obvious elsewhere, the effects of time and exposure were most positively noticeable in the answers given to the following question “Would you encourage a friend to take a class with THIS NNEST?” (see Figure 4). To this question, while already 56.78% of the students had answered yes at the beginning of the semester, 76.25% of them answered yes at the end.

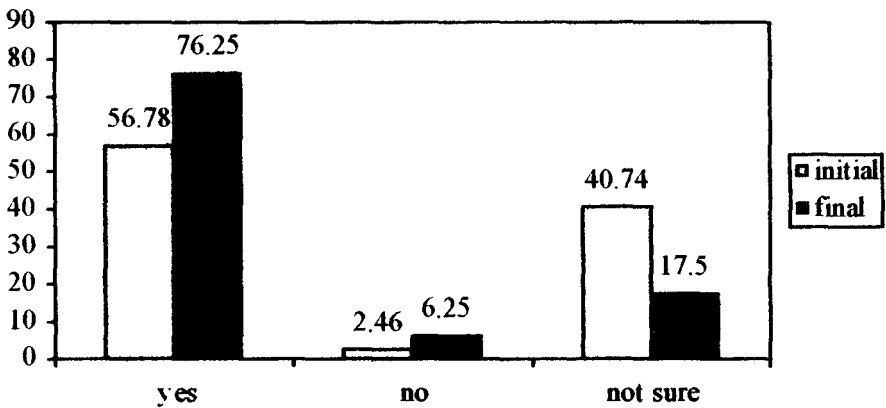


Figure 4: “Would you encourage a friend to take a class with THIS NNEST?” (initial: N = 82; final: N = 80)

It is hoped that with a larger pool of participants and in different schools, time would have made a more significant difference.

## Discussion

Overall, the students appear to have had a positive attitude towards their NNESTs at the beginning of the semester. Most students agreed that NNESTs had as much authority in the classroom as NESTs, that they respected and admired their teacher, that they would recommend this teacher to their friends, that they expected the class would be a positive experience, and that the teacher would be good for them. Most students also disagreed with the statements that NNESTs had difficulties in understanding and responding to their students and that they should not be allowed to teach ESL. From the students' viewpoint, the only negative aspect of the NNESTs was their lesser level of knowledge about US culture. This, however, is not surprising. Language is closely intertwined with culture, and a teacher's familiarity with the local culture is a distinct advantage in the classroom. What the students' negative response also shows is that they were thoughtful and honest in their responses, and carefully read the questionnaire items.

Considering the varied national and linguistics backgrounds of the students, these findings appear to be remarkable. The students were from 21 countries and spoke a variety of languages. Despite the fact that they had all come to the US for an expensive higher education, where they may have been expecting to be taught by "American" (Caucasian, native-English speaker) ESL teachers, they were on the whole positive in their attitudes towards and expectations of their NNESTs. This indicates that they may have already had positive experiences with NNESTs in their home countries, which bodes well for the quality of English teaching in the countries represented by these students. Braine (1999), Thomas (1999), and Lee (2000) recount negative experience with ESL students at IEPs in the US in the 1980s, such as students requesting a transfer out of or avoiding classes taught by a NNEST, or publicly embarrassing the NNEST. Although these may have been isolated incidents, the attitudes of most students in this study are in contrast, many actually expecting their class with a NNEST to be a positive experience.

In terms of teacher and student variables that influenced the students' perceptions of their teachers at the beginning of the semester, some findings are noteworthy. First, Korean and Chinese students tended to have more negative attitudes towards NNESTs. For example, in wanting to move to another class (presumably taught by a NEST), the Chinese students indicated a wish twice as strong as the Spanish and Portuguese students. This cannot be attributed to an "Asian" attitude or value because the Japanese



students in the sample displayed a more positive attitude towards NNESTs, an attitude that was in line with those from Spanish and Portuguese-speaking backgrounds.

The probable causes for this clear division among the students can be multiple. Do Asian students tend to give harsher judgments, while the Spanish and Brazilian students are more tolerant and forgiving? It could also have been that the Chinese group, being quite small compared to the Spanish group, in particular, may have been in one teacher's class. Whatever the reason, the patterns shown here have clearly demonstrated that the first language of the students is a significant and crucial variable. While it is regrettable that no deeper analysis was possible, the above discussion demonstrates that more research must be done in this area, not only with additional students but also with other NNESTs from different countries and language backgrounds.

Another noteworthy fact is that the students from different national/linguistic backgrounds responded differently when asked if they admired and respected their teacher because of his/her being a nonnative. One possible explanation is that because the majority of the students were from Latin America, they most admired and respected the two teachers who were also from Latin America. Further, these two teachers may have been excellent role models for the many Latin American students.

The final research question was related to the effects of time and exposure on students' attitudes towards NNESTs. As shown in the results section, the students began with a positive attitude, which tended to increase during the 14-week semester. For instance, at the beginning of the semester, 74.08% of the students stated that they felt that the teacher would be good for them. This increased positively to 82.72% by the end of the semester. As for recommending their NNEST to a friend, the positive response increased even more, from 56.78% at the beginning of the semester to 76.25% by the end.

## Conclusion

This study supports the findings of Liang (2002), Cheung (2002), and Mahboob (2003) in that, overall, students held positive attitudes towards the NNESTs in their home countries as well as in the US. However, the most important finding of this study is that the students' attitudes towards their NNESTs increased positively over time.

These findings, although representing only a small group of students from one school, are encouraging in the context of TESOL, Inc.'s policy formulated in 1992, which emphasizes the need for "minimal language proficiency standards that may be applied equally to all ESOL teachers without reference to the nativeness of their English" (p. 23). Indeed, the responses by the students regarding authority, respect, and knowledge show a high degree of support of their nonnative teachers.

As noted earlier, the percentage of NNESTs employed in IEPs is quite low (Mahboob et al., 2004). According to some administrators of these IEPs, the “native English speaker” criterion was a factor in hiring decisions, probably because of the widely held assumption that fee-paying ESL students may prefer to be taught by NESTs, an assumption now challenged by the results of this study. These results should encourage program administrators to hire more NNESTs, so that the linguistic diversity seen among the students in these IEPs could be better reflected among the teachers, and language expertise and teaching ability are given more prominence than native speaker status.

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# **Sociolinguistic Factors in TESOL: The Least Teachers and Teacher Educators Should Know**

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Historically, the focus of most methods and approaches to teaching English to nonnative speakers has been on some form of the language, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or spelling to name a few. In the Grammar-Translation Method, which is certainly one of the oldest teaching methods, the focus was on language structures. In the Natural Approach, a relatively recent language teaching development in TESOL chronology, the emphasis was on language in everyday language situations and a silent period (i.e., no language production).

In contrast to these traditional approaches, the Communicative Language Teaching approach has been built on the assumption that being able to communicate in a second language involves more than mere grammatical competence. In fact, *communicative competence* (Canale & Swain, 1980) inevitably involves knowledge of discourse and sociocultural rules of language. In other words, it is important to know not only how to put together an utterance but also when this utterance should be used and by whom to whom.

As communicative competence has been emphasized in language pedagogy, there has been a trend to rely less on purely linguistic aspects and investigate sociocultural factors that affect second language learners. This trend has been so strong that our field is experiencing a “reconceptualization” of second language acquisition (SLA) research to enhance the awareness of “the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use” (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 285). Other scholars have introduced and established the importance of social identity (Peirce, 1995), sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000), and critical, ideological studies (Pennycook, 2001) in our field. For example, a recent seminal publication in the field of applied linguistics—*Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (Hinkel, 2005)—dedicates chapters to topics such as language socialization, sociolinguistics and second language teaching, and identity in second language learning.

These recent publications all reflect the predominant belief that the process of second language learning never occurs in a social vacuum. Instead, research emphasizes that second language learners operate in very specific social settings. Moreover, language learners, as current scholars have illustrated through examining L2 speakers' textual experiences (e.g., see Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Vitanova, 2005), are not autonomous and independent free agents as traditionally thought. Rather, language learners are engaged in an active negotiation of their identities with specific others, and this negotiation is affected by a number of social factors including gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

What does this increased interest in the sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of second language acquisition mean to ESL/EFL teachers and TESOL educators? It is clear that we need to consider much more than grammar rules, vocabulary lists, reading comprehension quizzes, or essays. With this in mind, many TESOL programs have added sociolinguistics courses to the traditional courses in methodology, curriculum, and applied linguistics.

Our goal in this paper is to outline what we consider to be the critical components of sociolinguistics for language teachers and suggest how these components benefit both preservice and in-service teachers. At the same time, we wish to make a case that knowledge of sociolinguistics is essential to the current English teacher, and that it should become part of the core curriculum feature in ESL/EFL teacher education programs.

## **Sociolinguistics in Language Learning and Teaching**

The term sociolinguistics was first used by Haver Currie (1952), who commented on the absence of social factors in contemporary linguistics. Thus, early sociolinguists distinguished themselves from theoretical linguists, and specifically from Chomsky's overemphasis on a uniform speech community and an "ideal speaker-listener" (1965, p. 3). Such a speaker does not exist; speakers use a variety of language forms, depending on their regional location, socioeconomic status, race, or gender.

Today sociolinguistics is a large interdisciplinary field that, generally speaking, is concerned with the study of language in its social contexts. The aim of sociolinguistics is "to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices people make when they use language" (Holmes, 1992, p. 16). The choices that Holmes refers to may range from linguistic forms of regional dialects, registers, or forms of gender identification. To a native speaker, these linguistic choices may be conscious or unconscious, but in all cases, at the moment speakers of English choose a linguistic form, they are not merely producing

phrases and sentences in a social vacuum. To sociolinguists, linguistic forms always encode social identities.

These choices and the social significance that they carry are often not transparent even to educated native speakers of English, who switch between registers and styles (formal or informal) on an everyday basis and without much conscious effort. For example, a native speaker of English intuitively knows when to say, "Open the window" and when it is more appropriate to ask, "Would you please open the window?" A nonnative user of English, however, will need to be taught about the underlying sociocultural nuances of different speech acts, along with their appropriateness. Thus, ESL/EFL teachers should be explicitly aware of the sociocultural rules of English and be able to articulate this knowledge to their students. In what follows, we delineate five of the most important sociolinguistic components that should be included in an introduction to sociolinguistics for second/foreign language teachers, namely dialects and register, speech acts, world Englishes, and gender.

### **Dialects and Registers**

Theoretical linguistics is largely binary. In other words, a sentence is considered either grammatical or not. To sociolinguists, however, this binary nature of linguistics is limiting and artificial. Instead, the central focus of sociolinguistic investigation has been on the many degrees of language variation. Language variation refers to the fact that, because of geographic or social factors, no two speakers of the same language sound the same. Language variation may indicate a language (e.g., French, Spanish, or Korean), dialect, or style.

We are all speakers of a particular regional or social dialect. Geographic dialectology has a long history of investigation as both British and American regional varieties have been extensively documented since the nineteenth century. In contrast, the study of social dialects, that is, the study of dialects based on socioeconomic factors, was introduced much more recently, in particular by Labov's pioneering work with New York speakers' speech patterns (1966). Labov found that the pronunciation of certain linguistic variables, for example, the /r/ phoneme or the *-ing* ending, depended on other, nonlinguistic variables such as social class, occupation, and level of education. What is the significance of these regional and social phenomena to teachers of English and their students, and why should we be aware of them?

#### *Implications for Teaching*

There are several implications for the role of language variation in English language teaching. An obvious implication suggests that English language learners, particularly those who have studied in an EFL setting, may be confused by the diversity

they encounter in language use by native speakers of English. Having a basic understanding of the regional dialects in American English, for example, would enable a language teacher to articulate that regional variation in language is natural and that a native speaker in New York may sound different from a native speaker in Texas due to simple geography.

Unfortunately, when studying language variation, sociolinguists also frequently encounter misconceptions and intolerance toward regional and social dialects. A sociolinguistics course should also encourage language teachers to examine their own views about “correctness” and to disperse some common stereotypes about language varieties that are different from Standard English. For example, one widely held belief, even by educated speakers of English, is that only one variety of English, the Standard variety (either British or American), is the correct one. Such myths about language are, unfortunately, often transmitted to teachers themselves and to their ESL/EFL learners. Language teachers should increase their awareness of the social implications of language variation, and in turn, help their students assess and evaluate their own beliefs.

By becoming familiar with research on language variation, teachers would come to understand that regional and social dialects are not linguistically inferior to the Standard variety, and that, in fact, even Standard American English is a type of dialect. It just happens to be the dialect of the sociopolitically powerful class. Moreover, by exposing preservice and in-service teachers to different dialects (for example, through videos), teacher educators can demonstrate that although the Standard American English in New York does not sound exactly the same as the Standard American English heard on the local news in Texas, it does not mean that either of two is more accurate or more prestigious linguistically.

In addition to the variation among different speakers of a language (regional and social dialects), language teachers and their students should be aware of the variation that exists even within one single speaker of a language. Proficient speakers of English know how to position themselves on the continuum of language style; they know which speech situation requires a more formal rather than a casual speech style. For example, when preparing a speech for a class presentation, ESL/EFL students need to take into consideration the speech event and the audience to decide on the level of formality to employ. On the other hand, a speech situation involving classmates at an informal gathering will require a more casual style. Teachers of English should be able to help their students navigate the stylistic continuum depending on different social contexts and different interlocutors.

## Speech Acts

The term *speech acts* refers to verbal behaviors that language learners have to use routinely in social situations, including requests, refusals, and apologies. According to Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts, these could be classified as locutionary (indicating the literal meaning of the utterance) or illocutionary (emphasizing the social function that the utterance performs). For instance, to a native speaker of English, the seemingly simple utterance, "It is cold in here" could signify multiple meanings depending on the particular speech event and the relationship between the speakers. However, it is rarely interpreted as a simple comment on the temperature of the room. The listener may interpret this utterance as an indirect request to close the window if the window is open or to raise the heat on the thermostat. The question, "Could you open the door?" is another example of an indirect speech act. It is not a mere inquiry about the addressee's ability to open the door; instead it carries the intended meaning, "Open the door." A solid body of research has shown that that illocutionary speech acts are culture dependent and their use may create a great deal of intercultural miscommunication for ESL/EFL learners. (See Wolfson, 1989, for a comprehensive review of this area.)

### *Implications for Teaching*

One specific way for teachers to illustrate the multiple functions of speech acts and the socially appropriate ways in which requests, for example, are used could be through the teaching of modals. In traditional teaching, modals present a grammar problem, but teaching about these forms should be embedded in teaching the sociocultural rules of the language.

First, students have to learn the forms: *may, might, can, could, should, and must*. The first problem comes with learning the meaning because there is a good deal of overlap. For example, *could* is the past tense of *can*, but *could* is also the potential (conditional) form: *He couldn't open the jar* versus *He couldn't open the jar if she didn't help him*.

Almost every grammar book discusses the common syntactic mistakes that learners should not make. One rule says, "Use a base form of the verb after a modal, not the infinitive." (*It may rain*. Not: *\*It may to rain*.) A second rule is "Negate modals with not." (*He should not go*. Not: *\*He doesn't should go*.) A third rule says, "Do not conjugate modals." (*She can swim*. Not: *\*She cans swim*.)

Though the grammar lessons associated with English modals appear difficult, they are fairly straightforward. Modals, however, come with sociolinguistic rules that should be taught as well. Modals can be used to make speech more indirect, which is often viewed as more polite. This less direct and therefore less confrontational tone is especially important when talking to people that you do not know, such as on the



telephone or at a business, or when you want to sound polite. Notice how these utterances gradually increase in indirectness and politeness:

*Spell your name.*

*Can you spell your name?*

*Could you spell your name?*

*Would you spell your name?*

Some modals may appear to be semantically similar, but they can have different sociolinguistic usages. For example, the modals *should* and *had better* are similar in meaning. In fact, some bilingual dictionaries will even translate them the same, resulting in this example from an EFL teacher in Japan. A student, trying to tell the newly arrived teacher where to find a certain kind of food, announced in front of the entire class, “Teacher, you had better go to the small store by the river.” The teacher was stunned by this rather aggressive sentence from one of his meekest Japanese students. The sociolinguistic lesson here is that in English, *had better* is used only by higher status people to lower status people. For example, parents can tell their children, “You had better eat all of your dinner.” However, children would never tell their parents, “Oh, yeah? Well, you had better start cooking better food!”

### **English as a World Language**

Due to historical and commercial reasons, the English speaking community has spread far beyond the borders of England, the United States, or Australia. In fact, more than one billion people all over the world speak some variety of English; there are three nonnative speakers for every native speaker (Kachru & Nelson, 1996). While linguists used to speak of the mother country, that is, England and the colonies, sociolinguists today recognize three large geographical groupings of countries where English is used, namely Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. Inner Circle countries where English is the dominant language (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), Outer Circle countries where English is an official language functioning with others (e.g., India, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore), and Expanding Circle areas where English is used extensively for business or other specific purposes (e.g., China, Japan, Latin America, the Middle East).

#### *Implications for Teaching*

While numerous differences exist between these different Englishes, the important teaching point is that no single English is “correct.” A language exists for specific communication purposes within a certain context. If Singaporeans can use Singaporean English to communicate successfully with each other or with Japanese tourists or with Australian business people, then Singaporean English is correct for

those speakers' purpose. (The term *successfully* here does not mean only the ability of speakers to explain their ideas but rather the ability to explain these ideas in a respected variety of language that matches the educational and socioeconomic status of the speakers involved.)

The most important consideration in the choice of which English to learn is the students' goal in learning English in the first place. To use the Singaporean example again, if a Singaporean EFL student planned to live in Boston, USA, then that student would want to learn not just American English but rather the accent associated with Boston. However, a Singaporean EFL student who planned to work in a bank in Singapore would be wise to learn a variety of English that will ensure successful communication with customers in the bank where the student works.

## Gender

Gender is one of the most important social factors in sociolinguistics. Traditionally, the research in this area was largely variationist and quantitative. In a classic study, Trudgill (1975) found that the women he studied in Norwich tended to use more prestigious linguistic forms than the men in the study. For example, the women were more likely to use the complete *-ing* form rather than the phonetically simplified *-in*. Today, however, the research on the language and gender connection has become much more complex, and modern scholars believe that there is not a direct relationship between language use and gender. Instead, researchers have argued that each community constructs gender in a different way. There is not, for instance, any biological reason for girls and boys to use different language behaviors. Rather, they are socialized by particular speech communities to engage in gender specific roles (Cameron, 1996). Second language researchers have embraced this social understanding of gender (Piller & Pavlenko, 2001) and have applied it to multilingual settings.

We believe that language teachers need a better understanding of how scholars conceptualize gender. The relations between gender and language variation have social rather than biological roots. As a multitude of studies suggests, the role of gender differs in multilingual settings, and the acquisition of English as a second or foreign language depends on access to the language and on other sociocultural factors rather than on some innate ability. (For a comprehensive review on language and gender, see Ehrlich, 1997.) This awareness of the multiple contexts in which gender functions can help teachers avoid forming false stereotypes and expectations for their ESL/EFL students.

Sociolinguistic studies are concerned not only with the gender identity of the language learners but also linguistic features within the English language, especially sexist language and specific suggestions for avoiding it. Unlike other Indo-European languages, English does not have an elaborate inflectional morphology. Its grammatical

gender is marked in a few nouns, pronouns, and possessive adjectives, and the traditional grammar lesson involves learning the forms (*actor/actress, he/she, or his/her*). Nowadays, however, nouns that may have male/female counterparts tend to use only one form. Thus, *actor* is preferred regardless of the gender of the person. *Flight attendant* (instead of *steward/stewardess*), *chair* or *chairperson* (instead of *chairman/chairwoman*), and *host* (instead of *host/hostess*) are the standard, non-sexist terms. Having to learn only one form for a person's occupation or role—as in *doctor, teacher, lawyer, or nurse*—is certainly easier for second language learners.

### *Implications for Teaching*

It is always difficult for both native and nonnative speakers of English to talk about a generic group because we never know if we should use singular or plural, and if we use singular, should we use *he* or *she*? Consider this short paragraph that a student wrote about encountering new vocabulary:

When a student finds a word, he or she has to think about the word's possible meaning from the context if he or she does not know the meaning of the word. If there is time, the student can consult his or her dictionary, but what if he or she finds this word during a timed reading activity?

In English, it is awkward to use *he* or *she* repeatedly, but using only *he* or only *she* is not accurate because the class contains males and females. Traditional grammar has preferred the use of *he*, but this is inaccurate and sexist.

The solution to this is to avoid singular and use plural. Read this version of the same paragraph where every singular person reference has been made plural.

When students find a word, they have to think about the word's possible meaning from the context if they do not know the meaning of the word. If there is time, the students can consult their dictionary, but what if they find this word during a timed reading activity?

This second pluralized example has only 49 words to the original version's 58 words, a remarkable difference of 15% for such a short paragraph. Using fewer words means fewer opportunities to make an error. In addition, the words now accurately reflect the fact that students in the class have a quandary when they find a new word, and this quandary has nothing to do with the gender of the learner.

Pluralizing the nouns eliminates two other errors. First, many students, whether their first language is a language close to English, such as Spanish or German, or a language more distant from English, such as Chinese or Indonesian, frequently confuse *he* with *she* and *his* with *her*. Pluralizing the pronoun to *they* eliminates this error.

Secondly, the most common verb error in English, regardless of the learner's first language, is omission of the *-s* on the 3rd person verb form (e.g., *I like, you like, he likes*). The more *they* is used instead of *he* or *she*, the more accurate our learners' present tense verb forms are likely to be since there is no need for the *-s* morpheme. Because using *they* also removes sexism involved with *he* or *she*, pluralizing pronouns and nouns has syntactic as well as sociolinguistic value for our learners.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Our learners' language goals and outcomes depend on more than learning a generic set of grammar rules or a list of vocabulary items though we certainly acknowledge the importance of knowing grammar and vocabulary in a second language. However, knowledge of sociolinguistics is essential for ESL/EFL teachers. As seen in the examples in this article, sociolinguistic knowledge can heavily impact the teaching of traditional areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

As MA TESOL programs all over the world are offering sociolinguistics courses, we urge teachers in training to take advantage of these courses. For example, a review of courses listed for MA TESOL Programs in the *Directory of Teacher Education Programs in TESOL in the United States and Canada, 2005-2007* shows that a great many programs offer sociolinguistics courses in addition to the traditional courses in methods, curriculum, and applied linguistics. We urge both current and preservice teachers to attend sociolinguistic-themed sessions at teacher conferences. Almost all conferences have multiple sessions that deal with learner variables such as motivation, attitude, age, or gender.

Finally, in addition to the sources already included above, we recommend a set of useful sources of sociolinguistic information that can have a major impact on the way instructors view language, their students, and ultimately themselves as teachers:

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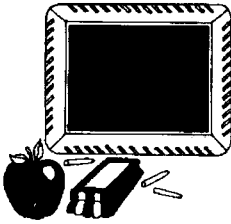
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# Tips for Teachers

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## Teaching Global Issues in the English Language Class

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Many language teachers find it challenging to smoothly integrate a principled approach to language instruction with presentation of stimulating content. We have found that using global issues helps us manage this integration and results in several other benefits as well. What follows is our rationale for using global issues in language classes along with some suggestions about materials and activities that have worked well for us.

### Why Do We Use Global Issues in Our Language Classes?

First, using global issues provides meaningful content within which language teaching can take place. Research shows that effective content-based instruction can lead to enhanced linguistic growth and a transfer of knowledge and skills to other contexts. Second, exploring global issues provides a context for integrating all four language skills. Third, global issues lend themselves to creation of effective student-centered activities such as role-plays, simulations, surveys, debates, and group projects. Fourth, lessons on global issues also create opportunities to bring the community into the classroom or take students into the community. These opportunities include inviting guest speakers, visiting non-profit organizations, taking other field trips, and doing community service projects. Fifth, discussion and exploration of global issues help students learn to see and respect different points of view on important issues, whether they are individual, cultural, or national perspectives. This also helps students reflect on their own beliefs. Finally, many ESL educators believe that they have a responsibility to promote peace, justice, and a concern for the world's problems among our students.

## What Are Some Global Issues That Are Appropriate for Language Learners?

In broad terms, environmental, economic, political, and social issues can all work well. Environmental issues include global warming, deforestation, and endangered species. Economic issues range from poverty to globalization and fair trade. Political issues such as war, peace, conscription of child soldiers, and use of landmines make good topics for class studies, as do social issues such as AIDS and other diseases, human trafficking, and access to water as a human right. These are just a few of the many issues that could be used. Teachers must choose issues that fit the setting, institution, and students that they are working with.

## Where Can We Find Suitable Materials on Global Issues?

### Textbooks

There are quite a few textbooks on the market that focus on global issues, but relatively few of them are written for English language learners. Some Japanese publishers are beginning to address this need. These two texts are written for ESL students at the intermediate level or above.

- \* Grohe, W., & Root, C. (1996). *Speaking globally*. Prentice Hall Regents.
- \* Day, R., & Yamanaka, J. (1998). *Impact issues*. Lingual House/Longman.

### Online “Books”

These resources have enough breadth and depth to provide sustained content for a full semester of study. While they are not books per se, they are as contentful as books.

- \* Online publications by the Office of English Language Programs, an entity within the U.S. Department of State, have an intended EFL audience, but we have used some of these materials in ESL settings as well. These are called *Forum Electronic Journals*, and they cover topics such as civic education, environmental education, peace education, business ethics, gene research, cloning, biotechnology, crop engineering, and drugs for the future. Each topic has 10 chapters. Some of the authors of these materials are experts in the field of sustained content in English language classes. The website address is [www.exchanges.state.gov/forum/journal](http://www.exchanges.state.gov/forum/journal).
- \* The United States Institute of Peace also has a Teaching Guide on Peace Education for English Language Learners. This guide was the brainchild of two Peace Corps volunteers and addresses conflict resolution in the classroom or



workplace. You can find these materials at [www.usip.org/class/guides/conflict.html](http://www.usip.org/class/guides/conflict.html).

### Online Resources for Educators

Unlike the two sites shown above, the following sites are especially aimed at educators. They all have a wealth of resources, including teaching activities, materials, and curricula. The notes below highlight a unique feature of each site.

- \* The Educators for Social Responsibility website has an online teaching center with a link to world maps and graphics. These give information on economics, education, energy, health and other topics. Visit [www.esrnational.org](http://www.esrnational.org).
- \* The American Forum has a curriculum and lesson plans on global issues, including 32 activities under the topic Global Teaching Tips at [www.globaled.org/curriculum3.html](http://www.globaled.org/curriculum3.html).
- \* The World Affairs Council Web site has a guide on understanding the Muslim world and resources about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The address for their site is [www.world-affairs.org/classroom.html](http://www.world-affairs.org/classroom.html).
- \* Facing the Future: People and Planet has several reasonably priced books on global issues. Activities to accompany the book are available at [www.teacherscorner.org](http://www.teacherscorner.org).
- \* Wide Angle is a PBS site with lesson plans that accompany its documentaries and Web episodes on global issues. Visit [www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/classroom](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/classroom).
- \* Global Eye News is an online resource connected with the magazine of the same name. It covers issues such as sustainability and tourism and includes case studies. The address is [www.globaleye.org.uk/archive/index/html](http://www.globaleye.org.uk/archive/index/html).

### ESL and EFL Professional Organizations

There are resources in the professional community of English as a second or foreign language teachers.

- \* Caucus for Social Responsibility in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Visit [www2.tesol.orgcommunities/tsr/](http://www2.tesol.orgcommunities/tsr/).
- \* Global Issues in Language Education, a special interest group (SIG) in the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). Their website is at [www.jalt.org/global/sig/](http://www.jalt.org/global/sig/). Kip Cates, a leader in the use of global issues in EFL

contexts edits the newsletter of this SIG called *Global Issues in Language Education*.

- \* Global Issues SIG in the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). Look for their website at [www.iatefl-gisg.org/](http://www.iatefl-gisg.org/).

The greatest source of materials on global issues is probably the hundreds of non-governmental organizations whose work directly relates to such issues. Frequently, high quality materials, from lesson plans to videotapes, are available free to educators. Individual teachers are in the best position to assess whether materials from a particular organization are readable or otherwise appropriate for their particular ESL/EFL audience. Some organizations have websites or teaching materials that are intended for young learners but may also appeal to adult language learners. Other organizations produce materials that are intended for mainstream students, but the topical content makes them especially appropriate for English language learners. An example in this vein is the magazine *Refugees* and related materials produced by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. Other such examples are mentioned in specific activities below.

### **What Are Some Examples of Language Class Projects Using Global Issues?**

Below are five examples of activities that we have used with global issues in our classes. All of them could be adapted for different topics or levels of learners. They range from a one-day activity to a four-day series of lessons.

#### **Example 1: Interpreting and Explaining Statistical Information**

Topic: Education of girls around the world

Level: Low intermediate

Culmination: Information gap

#### *Process*

1. Teacher gives students some background information on the plight of girls' education in some developing countries. (Information is available at the Girls Global Education Fund website at [www.ggef.org/status.html](http://www.ggef.org/status.html).)
2. Teacher gives each pair of students different statistical information from the website.
3. Students must create a graphic display of their statistical information.
4. Teacher provides colored pens and encourages students to be creative.

5. Teacher helps students with the language they need to use in explaining percentages, fractions, and trends. Students practice.
6. Students circulate with their partner to meet other pairs and exchange information.

**Example 2: Learning About NGOs**

Topic: NGOs  
 Level: High intermediate  
 Culmination: Poster presentation

*Process*

1. Students work in small groups.
2. Each group chooses an NGO. (An extensive list of NGOs can be found at [www.docs.lib.duke.edu/igo/guides/ngo](http://www.docs.lib.duke.edu/igo/guides/ngo).)
3. Students read background information online.
4. They take notes and report to their group in the next class.
5. As a group, they make a poster with key information and pictures.
6. They practice explaining their information to others.
7. Finally, they present the information to the class.

**Example 3: Exploring Various Aspects of a Single Issue**

Topic: Rainforests  
 Level: Low intermediate  
 Culmination: PowerPoint presentations

*Process*

1. Students work in small groups.
2. Teacher assigns each group one section from the Rainforest Action Network website: [www.ran.org/info\\_center/teacherstudent.html](http://www.ran.org/info_center/teacherstudent.html).
3. Students study their information together.
4. Teachers plan a workshop to teach essential principles of PowerPoint design.
5. Students prepare their presentations as a group.
6. Students share their presentations with the class.

**Example 4: Understanding Different Points of View**

Topic: Globalization and fair trade

Level: Advanced

Culmination: Class debate

*Process*

1. Teacher divides the class into two groups.
2. Teacher gives each group information from one point of view. For example, on this topic, one group reads ten benefits of the World Trade Organization (WTO) from [www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/10ben\\_e/10b00\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/10ben_e/10b00_e.htm). The other group reads ten reasons to oppose the WTO as presented by the Global Exchange Organization at [www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/rulemakers/topTenReasons.html](http://www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/rulemakers/topTenReasons.html).
3. Students work together to understand the point of view presented in their information.
4. Teacher outlines process for a debate appropriate to the linguistic level of the students.
5. The class holds the debate.

**Example 5: Thinking Locally and Globally**

Topic: Homelessness

Level: High intermediate or advanced

Culmination: Mini research project

*Process*

1. Using information from local sources, give a mini lecture on homelessness in the community where your school is located.
2. Students discuss opinion statements about homelessness and related issues.
3. Students read an article on myths about homelessness.
4. Students check their opinions against the articles they have read.
5. Students visit the website for the National Homeless Organization and read the profile of a homeless person. The address is [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org).
6. Students retell the story that they read to several classmates.

7. Students research homelessness and programs serving the homeless in their respective countries.
8. Students share what they have learned with their classmates.
9. As a class, discuss whether opinions and attitudes have changed as a result of this study and brainstorm a list of ways to address homelessness.

Besides classroom activities, students can also learn about global issues by becoming involved in activities at the school or community level. For example, our university holds student symposiums on global citizenship twice a year bringing together students, faculty, and citizens from the community. Many high schools and universities have student clubs, such as Model UN and Amnesty International, which focus on global issues. There are also numerous websites designed to link students in one country with students in other countries. Such linkages help students connect with people in other places as a first step toward understanding them better and respecting them more.

### **About the Authors**

*Sally La Luzerne-Oi has taught in Hawai'i, Wisconsin, Mexico, Venezuela, Portugal, Japan, and Ukraine. Her interests include materials development, professional development, and teaching speaking and listening skills.*

*Ivona Xiezopolski has been teaching ESL at the college level for the past 22 years. She has been teaching about environmental issues for many years, but has recently expanded her interest to include economic, political, and social issues as well.*



## Using Internet Activities to Increase Student Motivation

**Wang Xin**, Inner Mongolia Polytechnic University, PRC

As teachers, we are delighted when our students develop personal interest in the subject that we teach rather than thinking of it only as something that they must do to pass an exam or qualify for promotion. The Internet has the potential to help ESL and EFL students develop an intrinsic interest in learning English. Some students see the Internet as trendy and want to be part of it. Others are attracted by more practical concerns, for example, the opportunity of acquiring useful job skills. Whatever their reasons, many students are excited about using the Internet, and we can capitalize on this excitement.

After several attempts to tap into student interest, I have learned some valuable lessons. One is that teachers must be careful to integrate Internet tasks with class or program instruction. Internet tasks that seem to be extra or supplemental are likely to wither. In busy times, such tasks will seem less important and may even be abandoned by students, teachers, or both. A second lesson that I have learned is that I must be willing to provide or arrange computer skills training for many of my students. Despite the number of Internet connected computers available to them now, in a recent semester, only two of my 50 students reported being comfortable using a computer. If I do not address this need, in class or out, my students will quickly feel frustrated by the complexity of computer and Internet assignments. The third lesson is that I must remain actively involved with my students' Internet activities even after it may seem that my involvement is no longer necessary. At least one reason for this is that without oversight and assistance, students frequently have difficulty locating sites that are within their comfort zone in terms of readability. An activity that sounds fun can quickly become an exercise in frustration if students feel that they cannot understand what they are reading. Below I outline some ways in which I try to apply these lessons in three very common Internet-based activities.

### Writing to E-pals

I use an online source to locate another teacher whose class can correspond with mine. (One good source is [www.e-pals.com](http://www.e-pals.com).) In the beginning stages of correspondence, my students are more comfortable participating when they are assured that their letters are nearly error free. Thus, I ask students to e-mail their letters to me first. I print them

out and correct them on paper so that they can study the changes that I have made. Students input their changes and send their mail. Of course, the degree of correction that I provide varies with the proficiency level of the students. Although some students do not feel the need for their English to be checked, there is another reason to remain involved with their correspondence, at least in the beginning. That is to monitor messages for appropriate tone and style. This way, we can discuss issues of Internet etiquette, or netiquette, as they arise.

### **Surfing the Web**

Students really enjoy surfing the web to find sites related to their hobbies or personal interests. For many students, this, in itself, is motivating. On the other hand, some students feel overwhelmed by the English that they encounter when they begin such a project. One way to provide support is to survey students first about their special interests and then to preview sites to help identify some with readable information or easy-to-navigate pages. After students develop some experience and confidence, they rely less on my help. Even when they become more independent, I want to remain involved with their web surfing. For example, I ask students to send me e-mail with a link to their favorite site and a few comments about why they like it. This exercise helps them practice appropriate e-mail style and writing skills. I post their websites on our class homepage and might add a comment of my own. Then, students visit the page, read what their classmates and I have said, and reflect on what they have posted, as well.

### **Creating Bulletin Boards and Home Pages**

Typically, when my students are in the beginning stages of Internet use, I create a class homepage that the browser goes to by default. At first, I handle the upkeep of the site. I post links for students to explore, create a bulletin board where they can post comments, and use a page for class information and homework assignments. After students become comfortable using the computer and visiting the site, I can turn over more of the work to them. Sometimes they create their own sites or electronic magazines.

After several interesting or successful experiences with the Internet, students may become more intrinsically motivated to study English. They see that with the Internet the whole world is connected, and that with English, they can be connected, too. Also, with English, they have access to far more resources than they do without it. Thus, using the Internet shows them in a very concrete way the usefulness of acquiring English language skills. The Internet also provides students with many opportunities for authentic, communicative experiences in English. Students who are responding to e-

mail and posting opinions on discussion pages are intimately involved in creative and communicative uses of English. They are also likely to be exposed to lexically and syntactically more complex language on the Internet than in our language classes.

We have come full circle. The Internet can spark interest in English language learners. Then, with carefully designed activities, students build familiarity and confidence with both the computer and with English. Finally, they may see English in a more desirable light. The secret is integrating Internet activities with class work, providing assistance with technical skills, and remaining closely involved with their work.

### About the Author

*Wang Xin graduated from the College of Foreign Languages of Inner Mongolia Polytechnic University in 1993. Since then, he has taught English in the same institution.*



## Building Community With a Staff Newsletter

**Shiho Kawano**, Amity Corporation, Okayama, Japan

### The Setting

Amity Corporation is one of several large private corporations operating language schools throughout Japan. Amity offers a variety of English language classes to children and youth, from infant to high school age. Currently, there are 72 Amity schools nationwide, serving approximately 20,000 students. Each site employs both native speakers of English and Japanese teachers who speak English well. Although some Amity teachers have background in teaching English as a second language, many do not. Amity will be successful in its mission only to the extent that we can provide quality training and ongoing professional development and support for our teachers. We are using a monthly newsletter, *The Learning Center*, as one means of building a professional community among our scattered and diverse workforce, particularly the native English-speaking teachers who are new to Japan and to teaching.

Our experience with *The Learning Center* may be of interest to other language schools and institutes, particularly those with many branch sites. The questions and answers below summarize key points about the development of the newsletter and feedback we have received from our readers.



## Who Created the Newsletter and When?

No one on the current Amity staff remembers who initially started *The Learning Center* over ten years ago. At that time, it was faxed to each learning center. Later, Amity went through a period of understaffing, and the newsletter was discontinued. In 2001, the newsletter was reintroduced in its current electronic format by one of the company's teacher trainers. Now, it is e-mailed to the site managers who print and post it on the message board in each center.

## Who is Responsible for Producing the Newsletter Now?

One interesting feature of *The Learning Center* is that it is produced regularly despite the fact that it is not assigned to one particular person or position. After one year of teaching, Amity teachers have the opportunity to join the office staff as a trainer or emergency teacher. Trainers are responsible for conducting pre-service and in-service training. They support teachers through telephone contacts, school visits, and regular professional development gatherings. Emergency teachers are substitute teachers who are posted around Japan to provide temporary or short-term service where they are needed. Trainers and emergency teachers who are temporarily assigned to the head office generally pitch in to work on *The Learning Center*. Thus, it is a result of many hands working together. I can imagine that in other settings, it might be preferable to put responsibility for a newsletter like ours in the hands of one particular teacher or staff member.

## How Long Does it Take to Put Together an Edition of *The Learning Center*?

The time it takes to finish a newsletter varies depending on who is available and how many other duties they have in any given month. A rough draft can generally be created in a week. Then, senior staff members edit, offer suggestions, and solicit feedback from other teachers and staff.

## Can You Describe the Content of the Newsletter?

*The Learning Center* was originally created to give novice teachers ideas for language games and activities that would add variety to their classroom routine without much time-consuming preparation. We still try to meet this need, but since 2001, we have included several other columns as well. Now, the front page usually carries a teacher-of-the-month profile, a game or classroom activity, and notes about upcoming cultural events or festivals, both Japanese and Western. For example, the February edition included information about Black History Month, Valentine's Day (or Singles Awareness Day), and the Japanese *Hinamatsuri* (or Doll's Festival). Page 2 usually has a

simple recipe for a Japanese dish, often something that can be prepared in a rice cooker. It also includes an advice column geared toward common Amity class challenges and a Japanese language column. In the remaining space, we print additional ideas for classroom activities and recognize staff members who are coming, leaving, or having birthdays.

### **What Feedback Have You Received From Your Readers?**

In 2005, we asked readers to complete a survey. Their feedback indicated that they most appreciated teaching and craft ideas, the Japanese language and recipe columns, the teacher-of-the-month feature, and information about upcoming events. Readers also gave us some excellent suggestions for improving the newsletter, most of which would require adding length. These suggestions included requests for more teaching tips, particularly activities requiring little preparation, more information on Japanese culture and language, and more realistic advice in the advice column. For its part, members of the staff have talked about adding a humor column as well as a guest column featuring a teacher essay or editorial.

### **Do Your Teachers Have Access to Other Professional Development Opportunities?**

Yes, we provide intensive orientation for new teachers, quarterly regional meetings, and biannual conferences. At these events, teachers meet other teachers from throughout Japan and reconnect with the cohort that they trained with. Sessions include workshops, guest speakers, and publishers' exhibits. These gatherings are for both personal and professional development.

### **What Do You See as the Primary Benefits of *The Learning Center Newsletter?***

The newsletter reminds teachers that they are not alone and that the challenges that they face are probably similar to those faced by other teachers in other places. The newsletter reminds all of us that we are part of something greater than what we may see or feel on a daily basis, particularly if we feel isolated in our own small town or workplace. Finally, the newsletter helps teachers keep abreast of upcoming professional development opportunities and network with colleagues in distant locations.

### **About the Author**

*Shiho Kawano grew up in California speaking both Japanese and English. She earned her MA in TESL from Hawai'i Pacific University. She has been working for the Amity Corporation for four years and is currently serving as project trainer. She is interested in bilingual education and foreign language instruction for young children. To find out more about Amity, visit their website at: [www.amityteachers.com](http://www.amityteachers.com).*



## Using Graphic Organizers as Listening Tools

**Azzeddine Bencherab**, University of Saida, Algeria

Listening was once regarded as a passive skill, but researchers have helped us realize that listening tasks require far more of the listener than we once thought. This makes necessary a more sophisticated way of teaching and testing listening skills. Today there is greater emphasis on using contextualized and authentic listening tasks. However, I have found that with more authentic tasks, new challenges arise.

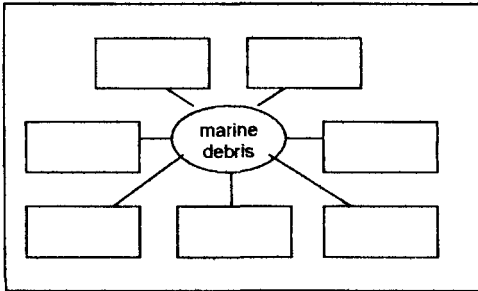
Like many language instructors, I find it useful to plan listening tasks with a process approach consisting of prelistening, listening, and postlistening steps. In a typical prelistening activity, I might give students some necessary background information about setting or content of the text that they will hear. I might also introduce key vocabulary or lead a short discussion on the topic of the passage to help students activate background knowledge that they already possess about the topic. Then, students listen to the actual text. They might be told to take notes or outline what they hear during this step. Finally, I choose from a wide array of possible postlistening tasks ranging from answering questions or summarizing to applying what we have heard to a new situation. As I have begun using more authentic listening tasks, however, I have found that my students require greater support for making sense of what they hear during the listening step. Graphic organizers have been very useful in this regard.

Graphic organizers, also called concept maps, provide a means for organizing information in a visual way. The organizer helps me show my students how the text that they will hear is organized. Graphic organizers come in many varieties. Venn diagrams, which many teachers will remember from their own study of mathematics, are one familiar form of graphic organizer. Organizers are readily available on the Internet and from suppliers of educational materials. However, after experimenting a few times, many instructors will probably find it just as effective, and certainly more economical, to create their own organizers for the materials that their students listen to. Let me illustrate with a passage that I sometimes use, from a 1992 Environmental Protection Agency publication called *Turning the Tide on Trash: A Learning Guide on Marine Debris*.

Marine debris includes all the objects found in the marine environment, which consists of not only the ocean, but also salt marshes, estuaries, and beaches, that do not naturally occur there. Although items such as tree branches and the bones of land animals

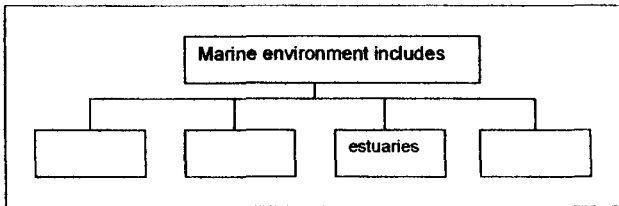
can be considered marine debris, the term generally is reserved for trash, or articles that have been made or used by people and then discarded. The most common categories of marine debris are plastic, glass, rubber, metal, paper, wood, and cloth.

In the listening task for this text, I want my students to focus on the description of a marine environment and the major categories of marine debris. To help them understand



the meaning of *marine environment*, I might give them a graphic such as this one. Filling in one of the boxes helps them see what to listen for. I do not need to give a wordy explanation of what to do, which in some environments tempts teachers to revert to first language use rather than giving instruction in the target language.

To help my students listen for the various examples of marine debris or trash, I might show them a graphic organizer like the one below. After they have listened



to the passage once or twice, both students and I can see at a glance what information they have understood and what they have not yet understood.

Graphic organizers are widely used in the field of elementary education, but they can be used at any level and are especially useful for English language learners and learners who are more visual than verbal. A lot of information can be shown without requiring many words or lengthy explanations. Graphic organizers have many uses beyond what I have shown here. For example, they can be used in reading lessons to show the structure of a written text. They can be used to plan, or outline, speaking and writing projects, as well.

### About the Author

*Azzeddine Bencherab currently teaches at University of Saida, Saida Province in Algeria. He has been teaching English for more than twenty years, including three years in Abu Dhabi. His main interests include developing reading and writing courses for mixed ability classes.*

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# *Fundamentals of Language Assessment: A Practical Guide for Teachers in the Gulf*

**Review by Neil McBeath**

Royal Air Force of Oman

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*FUNDAMENTALS OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR TEACHERS IN THE GULF.* Dwight Lloyd, Peter Davidson, and Christine Coombe, Editors. 2005, TESOL Arabia, pp. 192.

The subtitle of this book does it a disservice. *Fundamentals of Language Assessment* may have been aimed at teachers working in the Arab Gulf in the first instance, but the book has truly global implications. Examples may be taken from Arab Gulf contexts, but much of the advice is intercontinental in its application.

The book consists of five major areas, subdivided into 16 chapters, and a “Glossary of Important Testing Terms” is appended (pp. 183-192).

Part One—*Key Issues of Language Testing* (four chapters) gives an overview, “The Cornerstones of Language Testing” (pp. 3-16), before exploring test specifications, washback, and the extent to which teachers and students should share responsibility for test preparation.

Part Two—*Assessing Receptive Skills* (three chapters) gives directly practical, how-to-do advice on developing tests of listening and reading, together with a short paper entitled “Text Mapping” (pp. 65-71), which demonstrates how teachers can collaborate in the preparation of test items.

Part Three—*Assessing Productive Skills* (three chapters) examines tests of oral proficiency and writing skills while drawing the reader’s attention to the importance of using the correct approach when writing assessment scales. Both holistic and analytic marking have their advantages and disadvantages, and the teacher’s individual context will determine appropriateness.

Part Four—*Assessing Language* (two chapters) explores different approaches to the testing of vocabulary and grammar. The first paper considers multiple choice questions, completion and matching exercises, but also considers self-reports and translation. The paper on grammar retraces some of this material, but also covers the correction of sentences, rearrangement of items, and paraphrase.

Part Five—*The Future of Language Testing* (five chapters) examines portfolio assessment, task-based integrated skills assessment and computerized testing, but the first paper, “Alternatives in Language Assessment” (pp. 137-143), by Lisa Barlow and Christine Coombe also mentions self-assessment, student-designed tests, learner-centered assessment, projects and presentations. For this reviewer, the paper was tantalizingly short, and a restatement of its concerns, in far greater detail, would be more than welcome.

*Fundamentals of Language Assessment* is genuinely concerned with fundamentals. It is an excellent introduction to the field of English language testing, but many of the issues raised in this book go far beyond basics.

### About the Reviewer

*Neil McBeath is an English Education Officer working for The Royal Air Force of Oman. He is currently teaching ESP courses to aircraft engineering technicians. He holds two Master's degrees and has been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal of the Sultanate of Oman.*

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## Conference Announcements

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**Teacher Education in Language Teaching.** April 24-26, 2006. 41st RELC International Seminar. Contact SEMINAR SECRETARIAT SEAMEO Regional Language, Centre 30 Orange Grove Road, Singapore 258352 REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE. Tel: (65) 6885 7813 / 6885 7844. Fax: (65) 6734 2753. E-mail: admin@relc.org.sg. <http://www.relc.org.sg>.

**Eastern Mediterranean University.** May 2-5, 2006. Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus 2nd International ELT Conference, “ELT Profession: Challenges and Prospects.” Contact Dr. Suleyman Goker, Faculty of Education, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mersin-10 Turkey. Tel: (90) 392-630-2400. Fax: (90) 392-630-2542. Email: [suleyman.goker@emu.edu.tr](mailto:suleyman.goker@emu.edu.tr). <http://elt2006.emu.edu.tr>.

**METU International ELT Convention.** May 3-5, 2006. “The Fusion of Theory and Practice,” Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. Contact Serap Yucel and Aycil Oral, Convention Coordinators. Email: [metuconv@metu.edu.tr](mailto:metuconv@metu.edu.tr). <http://www.elt.metu.edu.tr>.

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## *ESOL Tests and Testing*

**Review by Kalei Kapuni'ai**

Hawai'i Pacific University, USA

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*ESOL TESTS AND TESTING*. Stephen Stoyhoff and Carol A. Chapelle. 2005, Alexandria, Virginia: TESOL, pp. 208. ISBN 1931185166. Price: \$29.95 (Member: \$21.95)

This text can be used by teachers and administrators to learn more about appropriate ways to assess ESL/EFL students. General information about assessment is provided, including concepts such as the importance of assessment and how to close the gap between teachers and testers. The practical advice offered in this book is informed by recent developments in research, especially the educational measurement theory.

Also included is basic information relevant to and a review of 20 of the most frequently administered tests of English ability in the world. These reviews consist of three sections: test purpose, test methods, and justifying test use. This section would be particularly useful for ESL/EFL teachers who are helping students prepare for a specific standardized test.

In addition, the authors present information on how to use a test manual to learn more about a test before administering it. This section focuses on the structure and content of typical test manuals, their relevance for test administrators, information about scoring and interpretation of assessments, and a discussion of reliability and validity. Another important assessment topic addressed here is the issue of how to evaluate the usefulness of tests. Some information covered includes the limitations of validation theory and a guide on how to analyze a test a teacher is considering for a given population. This chapter is particularly interesting for ESL/EFL teachers during the test selection process.

Finally, information about why and generally how to develop tests of English ability is discussed. Included is information about how to evaluate and improve a self-made test.

The text addresses each of the major topics thoroughly, using language and organization that is reader-friendly and attractive. This book offers a great deal of useful information and guidelines for ESL/EFL teachers and test administrators about assessing English language ability.

## About the Reviewer

*Kalei Kapuni'ai holds a dual BA/BS degree in cultural studies and environmental science from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. He teaches ESL part-time at Central Middle School in Honolulu, Hawaii, and is a graduate student in the MATESL program at Hawaii Pacific University.*

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## Conference Announcements

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**McGill University and York University.** May 4-7, 2006. "Language Acquisition and Bilingualism: Consequences for a Multilingual Society," Toronto, Canada. Email: labconf@yorku.ca. <http://www.psych.yorku.ca/labconference>.

**McGill University.** May 5-6, 2006. Second International Conference on Teacher Education, McGill University, Montreal. Email: programchair.education@mcgill.ca.

**Ohio TESOL, Kentucky TESOL, Indiana TESOL.** May 20, 2006. Clarion Hotel and Suites, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. email: sdberg@fuse.net.

**ATEL.** May 20, 2006. "Culture and Civic Education in ELT," The UNESCO Palace, Lebanon. <http://www.atelebanon.org>.

**IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG & the University of Cyprus.** May 26-28, 2006. "Learning Technologies in the Language Classroom: A Step Closer to the Future." Contact Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou. Email: yiansoph@cytanet.com.cy. <http://www.iateflcompsig.org.uk/cyprus2006.htm>.

**The National Research Centre of Foreign Language Education of the Beijing Foreign Studies University (NRCFLE, BFSU) and the Learning Technologies Special Interest Group of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG).** June 2-4, 2006. "Digital and Networked Foreign Language Learning and Teaching," FLTRP International Convention Centre, Beijing, China. Email: celea@fltrp.com. <http://www.call2006.fltrp.com>.

**Shanghai Jiaotong University.** June 3-4, 2006. "Canadian Immersion Education and Bilingual Education in China," Shanghai, P.R. China. Email: yiliming@online.sh.cn.

**Academy of Language Studies.** June 7-9, 2006. Universiti Teknologi MARA, "Passion and Preferences in English Language Teaching, Learning and Research," Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: My\_CASELT@salam.uitm.edu.my. <http://www.3.uitm.edu.my/apb/mycaselt>.





