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

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Utilizing Group Work Effectively in the English Language Classroom

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Among various teaching methodologies, cooperative learning has been said to be one of the most effective methods. Cooperative learning involves small teams working together towards a group task in which each member is individually accountable for part of an outcome that cannot be completed unless the members work together (Dumas, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Though cooperative learning encompasses a much greater scope of theory and practice, this study focuses on the implementation of one aspect—group work.

English teachers often encounter frustrations when conducting group work. Examples include, but are not limited to situations where: students fail to complete their share, causing the whole group to produce incomplete projects; students lack social skills to work with others resulting in groups breaking apart; or, students are unwilling to use the target language so that the native language dominates the classroom. In general, these situations are the results of ineffective group work planning. In this paper the author aims to share some of her studies and personal teaching experiences with group work and offer them as a ready reference for employing group activities in an English classroom.

Practicing Cooperative Learning By Group Work

In a cooperative classroom, students are encouraged and instructed to cooperate and communicate with others, and help each other in order to accomplish learning tasks efficiently (Feng, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). This task is achieved by practicing group work comprised of the following major characteristics:

1. Language learners work in groups using the target language to communicate, negotiate, and socialize. Receptive and productive skills develop simultaneously.

2. Target language is used in a meaningful context. As a result, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Davis, 1993).

3. Teachers serve only as facilitators and monitors while groups engage in their activities. Learning develops along with the engagement in activities.

Group work has been proven by researchers and practitioners alike to be an effective way of promoting learning motivation, enhancing performance, and lessening learners' language learning anxiety (Dumas, 2002; Kahle, 1993; Stahl, 1994). It seems to be an effective way to offer an interactive environment, which is essential to communicative language learning.

Group Work as an Effective Tool to Direct Over-sized and Low Motivation Classes

Group work is a much recommended strategy and common practice in the language learning classroom where the classes are over-sized and students' learning motivation is low. The following are among the primary reasons:

1. Increased use of target language for poorly motivated students: In circumstances where students take English courses as a requirement, as is true in many Asian Countries (such as China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan), many students react adversely. Group work is a proven method of increasing learners' motivation (Dumas, 2002; Feng, 2001; Yahya & Huie, 2002). Through group work, students are placed in a designated society and are provided with meaningful and enjoyable incentives when using the target language to carry out group tasks. Students' motivation increases as they practice their social skills. In addition, students have ample opportunities to be actively engaged in the target language rather than passively receiving information from the instructor.

2. Increased interaction between instructors and students in large classrooms: In a big class, instructors have little time to interact with individual students. Individuals' learning styles, preferences, and motives are hardly addressed. By dividing the large class into smaller groups, instructors can better interact with each group, and pay attention to individuals' needs.

3. Provision of instruction in accordance with different language abilities: In many schools students are grouped as a class according to their academic major or school year, not language level. Students' linguistic abilities vary greatly in the same class. As teachers have to direct their teaching to a class of mixed levels, students possessing very high or very low linguistic skills often do not receive enough attention. Teachers can deal with this difficulty by employing tactical grouping strategies, which could group students according to language levels, learning preferences or other unique qualities, such as motivation or interests.

4. Creating a better environment for students to use target language: In an "English as foreign language (EFL)" environment as opposed to "English as second language (ESL)", students hardly have any input of the target language in their daily

lives. The most common input and stimulation of target language come only from the classroom, usually from the instructor alone. Group activities are an effective strategy to better accommodate students' use of the target language under an EFL environment because they offer language learners abundant opportunities to interact and communicate with their peers in the target language.

Experiences of Practicing Group Work in the English Learning Process

To maximize the effectiveness of group work, instructors need careful planning and a thorough understanding of grouping.

Planning Group Work

Group Size. Group size depends on the activity and the duration of the activity. Three basic group sizes are:

1. Whole group. Whole group activities are often used to introduce new materials and concepts to the entire class (Valentino, 2000). It is appropriate for warm-up activities at the beginning of a lesson (Shank & Terrill, 1995).

2. Pairs. These work for quick, ad hoc, and temporary discussions. Students pair-off and work on a designated task for a short period of time. For example, students may conduct interviews, where one questions and one answers. The smaller the groups are, the less intimidated the students are. Pair work gives learners greater opportunity to use the target language in a less threatening environment. When planning pair groups, pairing by ability is the dominant consideration. Similar ability pairs succeed when partners' roles are interchangeable and equally difficult. On the other hand, cross-ability pairs will work when given different roles and heavier demands are placed on the more proficient learner (Bell, 1991; Shank & Terrill, 1995).

3. Small groups. In general, experiences show that groups of three or four students, no more than five to six students maximum, work best. Groups that are larger than this decrease each member's opportunity to participate actively and increase their chance to "hide" in the group. The less skillful the group members are, the smaller the groups should be (Davis, 1993). For larger projects that last over several class periods, instructors should specify a team plan of operation and goals to be achieved. It is advisable that each group member be assigned a clearly defined role such as leader, recorder, presenter . . . etc. Furthermore, teachers need to take time to explain how each role works (Damian, 1999).

Grouping Strategies. Frequently employed grouping methods include the following:

1. Random grouping is often used for in-class activities because of its readiness and convenience. Teachers usually group students by their seating arrangement or by serial numbers given by the school. Depending on the time available and the types of activities, instructors can also use games, competitions, or any other ways that produce groups and making grouping fun. For example, groups can be formed by learners' interests in the topics to be pursued. Randomly assigned groups, however, ignore the differences among students, such as their language level, learning styles, and abilities (Feng, 2001). It works best for competitive review activities or projects that do not take a long time.

2. Student-selected grouping is probably the most preferred option by learners. Students often cluster with good friends. Students are more likely to participate in activities if they feel they are among friends rather than strangers (Davis, 1993), especially when they have to use a language over which they have limited control. When engaging in group work, learners feel more comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and enjoying themselves while using the target language among friends. However, this runs the risk that groups will socialize too much and creates a situation where an "outsider" who joins this group may feel left out (Davis, 1993). Also, it is possible that stronger learners would assume the share of work for weaker ones.

3. Instructor-formed grouping is acknowledged by most teachers as requiring the most amount of careful planning (Davis, 1993; Feng, 2001; Valdez, 1999; Valentino, 2000). When forming groups, teachers take into account students' prior achievements, level of preparation, work habits, learning preferences . . . and so forth. Because of the complexity of grouping, instructor-formed groups are usually used for large, long-term and complex projects that require many meetings, (even last a whole semester) and may consist of four to six students.

Problems and Solutions in Utilizing Group Work

Successful group work does not solely depend on the careful planning of the teacher; students' participation also plays an important role. Due to students' unwilling attitudes, either caused by lack of understanding or no experience with group work, some problems can appear during group work. The following are some problems that the author has encountered when engaging group work. Solutions follow:

1. Learners are dissatisfied with the grouping arrangement. Teachers can go through the activity and explain why the groups are arranged this way. Give the learners reasons why they should stay in the same group. Before the task, a small discussion about group dissent and conflict resolution could prevent the breaking up of groups later on.

2. The learners use too much native language. At the beginning of the activity, teachers should emphasize that students must use the target language in group work. The instructor then circulates around the classroom to remind learners of this rule and provides them with language assistance. The teacher can also join the group briefly to encourage and facilitate the learners' participation. The teacher may also set rules, agreed to by the class, for disciplining frequent offenders. For example, if a student is caught speaking the native language three times during the activity, he or she has to sing a song in the target language for the class.

3. One or two group members do all the work. To avoid passive observers in group work, each group member should be assigned a clearly defined role. For example, a "leader" assigns a different job for each member; a "secretary" should take notes; and a "presenter" reports on the final conclusions reached by the group. It is a good idea from time to time to assign tasks to dissimilar learner types. For example, let the usually taciturn learner be the reporter, the noisy one be the secretary, and the shyest learner be the leader (Wheeler, 1994).

4. Students lack the social skills needed to work with others. Some students prefer to work alone, or just do not get along with other members of the group. The teacher should encourage students to stay in group work, and at the same time assist the group by assigning them a task that would give them some sort of isolation. For example, if information collection via Internet surfing is part of the project, this type of student can take the job. It must also be realized that working as a team takes practice and some training may also be essential.

5. The classroom is noisy and chaotic. If students do not know what exactly they are supposed to do, they may argue with each other or even shift the discussion to irrelevant chatting. It is worthwhile to spend some time at the beginning of the lesson explaining and organizing the activity. Some noise is an inevitable part of group activities, especially in a language classroom where speech is the basic element. As long as students are actively involved in the activity, this should be considered productive.

Assessment

As a language teacher, the goal is to build an environment for the learners to develop their language ability, to pass his or her knowledge about language to the learners. But for the students the goal is to fulfill a school requirement. In fact, the students care about the grading the most. Experience shows that teachers often encounter protests from students about the unfairness of group work. It is inevitable that some members do not equally contribute to the task while the whole group receives one grade. The ways to deal with this problem are:

1. Reducing group grades to account for only a small part of the final grade of the individual student, say, 10 percent or 20 percent.

2. Requesting that each student fill out a self-assessment form stating their contributions and asking students to grade themselves according to pre-set criteria given by the teacher.

3. In addition to self-assessment, teachers may also give students a chance to evaluate their peers. The evaluation can be presented by a descriptive report, a pre-designed check-box type format, a scale of percentages on performances compared with other learners, or a traditional score report on individual pre-set criteria.

When teachers grade, they can take into account the self-assessment, peer evaluation, and their own observations.

Conclusion

The employment of group activities does not mean that teachers can sit back and only do the grading. It takes preparation and planning before the classes, proactive energy during the classes, and reflection afterwards. The design and implementation of effective and productive group work requires experience and practice. Teachers can work as a team to learn from each other, provide support to each other, and exchange new and better strategies tailored to their own situations.

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Promoting EFL Literacy Via Promoting Motivation: A Case for Writing Skills Development

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Introduction

Developing literacy in English as a foreign language (EFL), i.e., as a language taught outside an English-speaking setting, may be viewed in different perspectives. The first perspective (basic L2 literacy) is focused on developing learners' general reading and writing skills up to the standard providing for basic reading and writing needs in whatever field. For instance, in teaching writing it means teaching spelling, words, and combining written words into sentences in accordance with the rules of grammar and syntax. Another perspective (specialized L2 literacy) is based on considering literacy formation as developing students' abilities of reading and writing only specific kinds of English texts. For instance, a curriculum for Business English studies may set the goals of students' acquiring the ability of reading several (previously selected) types of business letters, CVs, business contracts and agreements, as well as of writing business documents of the same categories.

Both approaches are often used as a sequence, the first as a basis for EFL literacy development in courses of General English, while the second one serves for the needs of different Business English and/or ESP courses that may follow a General English course. What makes both approaches quite similar is the fact that each of them presupposes attaining a certain point in learners' literacy development, and after reaching it, you need not proceed any further within the framework of a particular program.

The third perspective (advanced, or proficiency, L2 literacy) is distinguished by viewing literacy acquisition in EFL as a life-long process having no final pre-set standard of skill development to be attained. It is a process of constant self-improvement that may result not only in achieving the skill level of reading and writing in English characteristic of an average educated native speaker but even in surpassing that level.

When pursing this approach in teaching writing, we train our students not just to write grammatically, syntactically, and stylistically correct passages in English, but to

write creatively, crossing the borderline between an academic essay or composition and a piece of literary work written not so much for a grade as for the writer's (learner's) own enjoyment and the enjoyment of other people.

Therefore, in writing instruction, for instance, this perspective of permanent literacy enhancement embraces creative writing as a set of "imaginative tasks" (Harmer, 2001, p. 259). Nowadays, such tasks play an increasing role in teaching writing both in ESL and EFL settings (see, for instance, Morgan 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 1997; Tarnopolsky, 2000. Generally the tasks akin to creative writing that they can be introduced at a relatively advanced stage of language acquisition. Otherwise, learners may lack the language for creating imaginative written works in English. Besides, quite a high level of motivation is required. If students consider imaginative writing tasks as regular academic ones with little or no personal enjoyment, there is not much hope that they will deploy all their abilities to achieve the best possible and not merely positive-grade-sufficient results.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate a way of providing the required learners' motivation when using imaginative writing tasks for developing their advanced L2 literacy in the course of English for upper intermediate students.

Context

The material for the report was collected in the Fall semester of the 2002/2003 academic year from a group of 10 students (all females, 18-21 years of age) majoring in translation from and into English at the Department of Foreign Languages for Business in Dnipropetrovsk University of Economics and Law (Ukraine). The students of the third-fifth years of study were joined in one group for optional one-year-long training with the aim of getting prepared for the *First Certificate of English (FCE)* exam developed by *UCLES* (University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate) and administered in Ukraine by the *British Council*.

All the students have achieved the upper intermediate level in their command of English. According to the *UCLES* criteria (FCE: First Certificate in English, 1997, p. 6), they were perfectly ready for exam preparation training in all the five papers included in the FCE—*Reading, Writing, Use of English, Listening, and Speaking*. The training course was based on the coursebook specially developed or prepared for the *FCE* exam—*Focus on First Certificate* by Sue O'Connell (1997).

From the beginning, the students enjoyed the course and were quite successful in their work with the coursebook and in preparation for all the exam papers except one of them—*Writing*. Teaching writing at the advanced L2 literacy level proved to be the greatest problem—spelling and grammar mistakes abounded in written works, and those

works were colorless, unemotional, and obviously written to get the task done and forget about it. Extremely low motivation was visible, and that impression was confirmed by students' own comments. They were bored with doing writing assignments and therefore, did not invest much effort into completing them. Hence, most errors that occurred were just the result of carelessness and not lack of knowledge or training.

It was not the fault of the coursebook's writing assignments. They were mostly imaginative, based on genre analysis of texts to be written, and process-oriented. Nor was it a lack of interest for the suggested writing topics (e.g., leisure activities, crime, environment, life in the future, and others), because the same topics were discussed with the liveliest interest in speaking, reading, and listening assignments. It was just doing the assignments in writing that discouraged students because they simply did not like writing and were not really used to it. Writing had never been in the forefront of their activities in all there other English classes (see Tarnopolsky, 2000, on the issue). Therefore, to enhance writing skills and promote what was earlier called advanced L2 literacy, some urgent measures had to be taken to help learners become more motivated in doing their writing assignments.

Rationale and Procedure

Promoting such motivation can be achieved by making the writing tasks as personalized as possible in the sense that they can involve not only students' imagination, but arouse ambitions and perhaps a spirit of competition. All the preceding writing assignments had been done for the teacher to comment on and evaluate. Even brainstorming before writing and peer-evaluation after it, which are recommended by the process approach and were used extensively in the course, did not radically change the situation. It was a matter of unexciting work being done exclusively for the teacher's evaluation and grades, and that proved to be an insufficient incentive. The other incentive, getting ready for the *Writing* paper in the FCE exam, was not sufficient either. The exam seemed too far away (the end of the academic year) to concentrate on the tasks, which were not of the learners' preference, so they focused on what they really enjoyed doing—speaking.

The means for overcoming that reluctance of doing writing assignments and indifference to writing as a skill to be carefully developed was believed to be found in providing total student *independence* of the teacher and his grades. That independence (learner autonomy—see Benson & Voller, 1997) was combined with mutual *interdependence* of students as evaluators of each other's works. We believed that mutual evaluation would encourage ambitions and the spirit of competition because writing would be done only for peers as readers and not for the teacher.

To create such an environment for doing writing assignments, a change in teaching procedure was undertaken. The change was introduced when students were working on Unit 3 *Enthusiasms* of the coursebook *Focus on First Certificate*. The final writing assignment in that Unit (p. 54) is as follows:

> You have been asked to write a short article for a students' magazine on a sports or leisure activity of your choice. It will be a part of a series of articles called "Time off" in which writers describe the activity they enjoy and encourage others to take it up. Write your article in 100-150 words.

After giving this assignment and informing students that it should be completed before the next class (three-day period), the teacher declared that he himself would not read, comment, grade, or evaluate it. Every student was appointed three peer-reviewers (evaluators) to whom she had to give three copies of her work. The evaluators were required to read the work submitted to them and individually and independently of each other provide its oral critique in the class that followed (before the critique, the work was read aloud for the benefit of the whole class). After all the critiques were listened to, there was a whole-class discussion where the student whose work was being discussed could give her ideas concerning the critique, justify her approach, etc.

As to the specific assignment given above, the evaluators were requested to focus on three questions in their critiques:

1. If you really came across that article in a students' magazine, would the title and the first sentences catch your attention so as to make you start reading? If so, why? If not, why? Give your reasons.

2. If you started reading such an article, would you read it to the end or stop before finishing it because the article was too boring and unexciting? If so, why? If not, why? Give your reasons.

3. If you read the article to the end, would you feel convinced by the author and encouraged to take up the suggested activity? If so, why? If not, why? Give your reasons.

It was also declared that from that moment on, all the written assignments would be done in a similar manner. The teacher stopped commenting on and evaluating the students' works either when they were being discussed or later—unless such comments and evaluations were specifically requested. Thus, total teacher-independence and mutual student interdependence was ensured.

As can be seen from the guideline to evaluators given above, they concerned mostly the content of the written pieces, their styles, format, etc. and not so much their language form. At the same time, the evaluators were encouraged to point out the language faults that spoilt the overall impression made by the written work being

evaluated. The other encouragement was the request to pay special attention to the success, or failure, of the writer to express and share her feelings and emotions. Special attention was also to be paid to the imagination, creativity, and originality of the writer as demonstrated by her written piece.

In this way the evaluators were indirectly encouraged to evaluate not only the written works, but also the personal qualities of the writer—intelligence, imagination, originality, ability to interest other people, and recognize her ideas as attractive and exciting. One already mentioned fact should be strongly emphasized once again—the assessment was not made by the supreme class authority, the teacher, but by peers. At the same time, there was little danger of students' lack of objectivity in their evaluations and comments. Everybody was both an evaluator and a person evaluated by others so that everybody had to be fair in order to be treated fairly. It was hoped that such an approach would not fail to awaken students' ambitions and the spirit of both cooperation and competition, making them *do their absolute best* in every writing assignment. The efforts to do one's best, in turn, could not fail to promote rapid writing skill development, thus promoting advanced L2 literacy as the basis for really imaginative writing.

Outcomes

The highly positive writing results were the immediate outcome after introducing the changes in teaching procedure discussed above. The students started producing pieces of writing of the quality that they had never attained before. It can be seen from the two sample pieces below. They were written by two students who gave their permissions to publish their *'articles for the students' magazine'* but preferred to stay anonymous. The samples are published exactly as written by the students.

Sample 1

Cause the Sun Will Shine Again

There are days that make you fly, as well as days you want to cry. I suppose, there is no need to ask what to do when everything is fine, you just feel good and don't care about the answers. But have you ever asked yourself what to do when you are bad? Of course, you have. And what are your solutions? Eating tons of chocolate? Buying new clothes/books (choose the right variant) for yourself? Drinking? Mine is taking a walk out in the rain, but without any umbrella.

Ready? Just put on your favorite anorak and go out! It's really cool, believe me! There aren't a lot of people, only few, perhaps as crazy, as you are. Your soul is just like this rains! Tears are falling from your eyes and from the sky. This moment you feel as one with nature. And with those tears all your troubles and problems are going outside as well.

Take a good breath of the air full of ozone! Have you ever noticed that it smells so good! Don't say to yourself: "yes, I have", just breathe it. You are passing street after street . . . Have you noticed that the trees are different from those they were the day before? Everything has changed, because everything is constantly changing.

Here you begin to understand that your problem will stop worrying you, just like this rain. Have you ever seen a never ending rain? The same thing here is with your troubles, so straighten yourself up and smile, cause the sun will shine again . . .

Sample 2

I saw you flying . . . A daydream? Not it was real!

Tired of monotonous shaping with fat women around eating after each training or jumping in front of TV trying to look like Cindy or Claudia ...? Well, there are two ways out: either die ugly and forgotten or go in for dancing.

I always dreamt about dancing, but how afraid was I to be the worse, to be laughed at . . . At the end of my long-long life (which usually comes when you're twenty) I decided "why not", so I was right.

Your body aching . . . Your soul singing. Sounds like lunacy? No just too close to harmony. And you are dancing with music filling each millimeter of your flesh, each your nerve, each your cell. Elation is your only state since now.

No doubt, a lot depends on your trainer. I am lucky to have the best one, who is in love with dancing. Imagine, I feel happiness just looking at him and peace and never ending calmness.

Hey, you, quit reading all this stuff! You're still sitting in an armchair and eating a cheeseburger? I saw you dancing, I saw you flying and you were happy, extremely happy.

The two written works are different from what the students used to write before in several aspects:

1. Highly imaginative and emotional character makes the written pieces genuine passages of English prose. It is felt that the students were really doing their best and invested considerable efforts to attract their readers' attention, to make reading an exciting experience for them.

2. Highly personalized character of writing was never observed before, with obvious attempts to demonstrate the positive, attractive features of writers' personalities, thereby arousing interest in those personalities by other people (readers).

3. Attempts to use all the language means at the writer's disposal ensures those characteristics of the written pieces that were indicated above. The careful selection and handling of the language means, which the learners admitted to in interviewing, made the written passages quite sophisticated for average students. The writers did say later that it had taken a lot of their time to think over the language of what was to be written and a lot of work with dictionaries, reference books, and other sources to find *"just the right way"* of expressing themselves.

4. Ruthless self-editing was done by writers before submitting their works to evaluators for evaluation. When being interviewed, the writers admitted to that self-editing, saying that never before had they been so thorough and taken such pains in doing the self-editing job. The reason was their reluctance to spoil by language errors the impression made by their manuscripts, and that reluctance resulted in elimination of most of those errors so that only minor ones were left in the final versions of written passages.

The same characteristics distinguished the writing done by all the students from the moment when the described procedure was introduced. As a result, writing ceased to be a problem in the course as a whole. The students became willing and enthusiastic in doing their writing assignments, and that enthusiasm is obvious in one more piece of writing done at a later stage in the course by another student who also granted her permission to publish her work anonymously.

Sample 3

Wake Your Talent Up!

Suddenly a terrible blood-freezing howl was heard: a long and hollow scream rose languidly from the woods—it was the sort of scream you might expect from a she-wolf dying in extreme agony and extreme fear. A thin sliver of moon was floating dead in the inky sky.

Then dead silence fell down, not a leaf moved, not a tree creaked. Then it came back. The scream climbed with a crazy ease through octave after octave, finally reaching a glassy, freezing edge. It hung there for a moment and then whirled back down again, disappearing into an impossible bass register that buzzed like a monstrous honeybee. That was followed by a burst of mad laughter . . . and then there was silence once more. "Hey you!", suddenly another voice cryed again, but this time much closer. You feel that your hair stood on end. "Stop that writing, you lazybones, and do the washing up for a change!"

Yes, the last voice was the real one and all this horrifying things before were nothing but imagination that was written on a sheet of paper. You may call it also creative writing, inventing, story-telling or whatever you like. The main principle is one and the same: use your own fantasy, create your own world, make it the way you like and enjoy yourself!

Just think of enormous possibilities that are kept back in you. Take a white sheet of paper, a pen and turn on your imagination. Don't even dare think you don't have any! Remember your childhood and all horror stories you've told each other in the camp, all the romantic, historical, adventurous stories you've heard. Maybe you didn't like their endings? So write the one you prefer! Make the tale just the opposite, turn a touching romantic story into a comic one if you find it too sentimental.

All in all it just your choice, your fantasy. You can write it only for yourself, for friends, you may create one even for a newspaper or a youth magazine. Try and convince yourself that you are talented and have your own way of thinking and feeling.

It requires no special proofs to assert what great positive influence such students' attitudes exert on developing their writing skills. The same may be said about advancing their L2 literacy. Those attitudes are the basis of learners' gradually becoming genuine and enthusiastic *writers in English* instead of always remaining students of EFL writing, reluctantly mastering the skill to provide for some practical needs, like, for instance, taking an exam.

Conclusion

Writing is rarely, practically never, an activity that students prefer or are interested in, even at advanced stages of acquiring English. "For many students writing is a chore to be got through for a grade, and to many others, not only is it a chore, but a

boring one at that" (White & Arndt, 1991, p. 11). Such learners' attitudes make the development of L2 writing skills and advancement of their L2 literacy a very slow and precarious process. The solution lies in changing the attitudes, and that can be achieved through changing learning motivation for writing. The approach suggested in this report has proved to be very effective in attaining the desired motivation change so that rapid development of skills and L2 literacy is assured. That is why the approach seems to be promising for all similar conditions of EFL teaching and learning.

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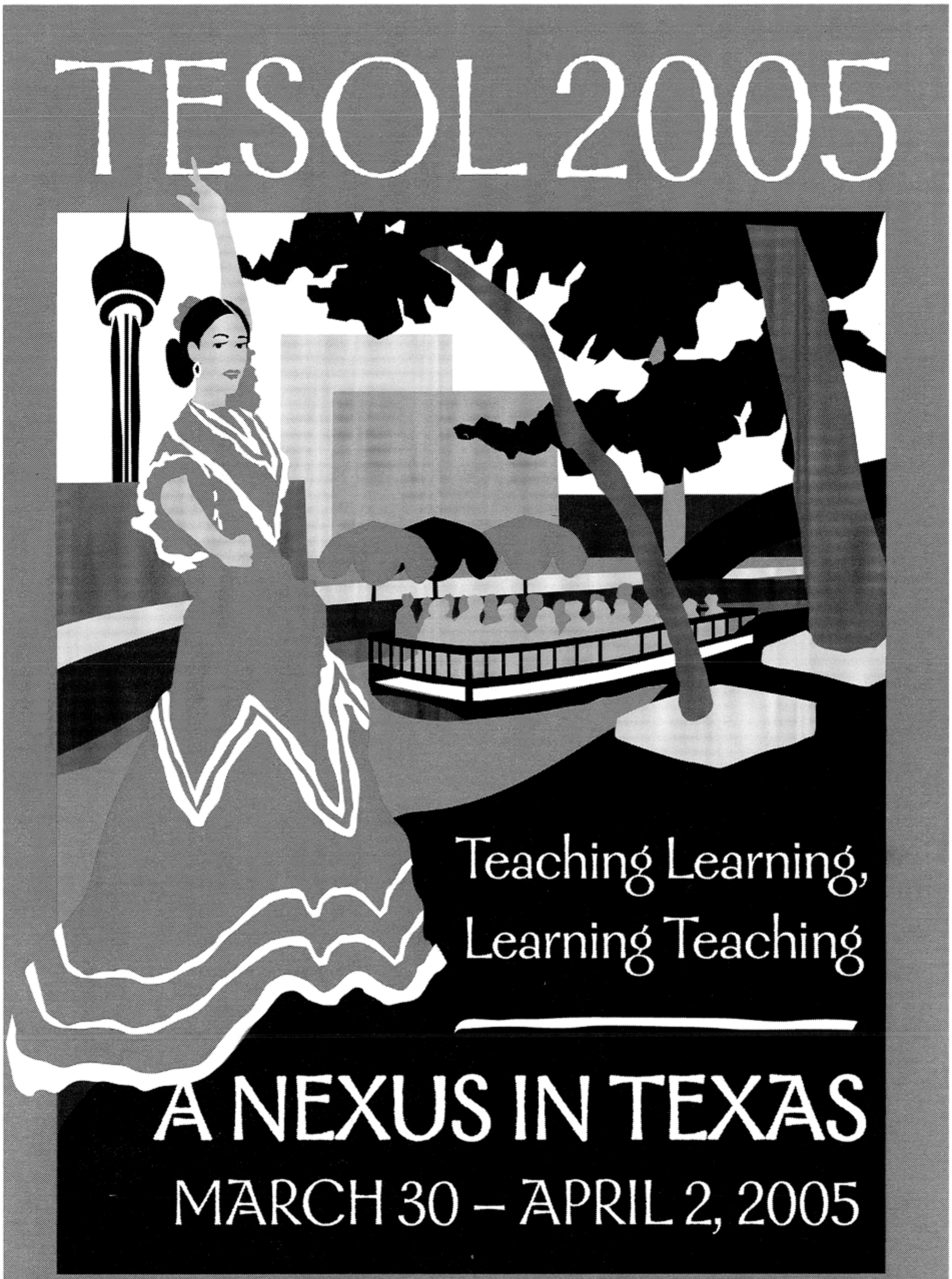
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Students' Reflections on the Physical Features of EFL Graded Readers

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Graded readers are books written or adapted especially for second or foreign language learners, by controlling vocabulary load, grammatical structures, and the amount of information (Hedge, 1985; Hill, 1997). Often, the level of graded readers is graded from beginner to advanced, and this "ostensibly ensures that learners can read with relative fluency without being overwhelmed by unfamiliar structure and vocabulary" (Bamford, 1984, p. 218). In other words, the main purpose for this grading is to control the language and information so that they match the competence of the students. Therefore, "grammatically accurate language" and "limited vocabulary and sentence structure" are the most common strengths of graded readers (Hill, 1997, p. 76).

The use of graded readers has been promoted by many individuals and organizations. An example is the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER), established in 1981 by Dr. Clive Criper. The project aims at providing a "tailor-made list of suitable books and supporting materials, such as tests, reading cards, teachers' guides for class readers, and handbooks for administration at Ministry, school, and classroom level" (Hill, 1988, p. 44). Since then, by providing lists and materials, the EPER-based reading schemes have been set up successfully in many countries such a Cameroon (Davis, 1995), Fiji (Elly & Mangubhai, 1983), Hong Kong (Lai, 1993), Japan (Robb & Susser, 1989), Malaysia (Raj & Hunt, 1990) and Singapore (Elly, 1991). Graded readers have been used internationally in extensive reading programmes and related studies. Along with the remarkable development of graded readers, the director of the EPER, David Hill, and his colleagues have produced several excellent survey reviews (Hill, 1997, 2001; Hill & Thomas, 1988a, 1988b; Thomas & Hill, 1993) on graded readers, demonstrating the potential for their use in fostering voluntary reading for pleasure and language learning.

Stating graded readers should be resources for language learning, Hill (2001) recommends in his up-to-date survey review eight criteria for teachers to select readers for their students: motivation, fluency, language learning, source of exposure, use of books, and teacher training. Accordingly, he then examines eight series which aim respectively at two markets: Worldwide, and Africa and Spain. He reports that "57% of graded readers score 4 out of 5 on the EPER assessment rating" (p. 303); "their

accessibility is fairly easy and the cost is reasonable and they can be used in many different situations." While he welcomes the increase of new titles, the lavish use of colorful artwork, and the availability of resource materials, he was disappointed that some books still included in the most recent series have mediocre titles and boring texts. In summation, the other points of each series are as follows:

1. *Macmillan Heinemann ELT Guide Readers*: gap in language level between the beginner and the elementary level.
2. *Macmillan Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers:* dense text, and no questions or other aids to learners.
3. *Penguin Readers Easystarts*: lack of space and dense text.
4. *Penguin Readers*: small print font, poor rewriting, and incomprehensible level of stories.
5. *Oxford Hotshots Puzzles:* not reviewed.
6. *Oxford Bookworms Starters*: no fault found.
7. *Oxford Factfiles:* a failure of standard layout of the junior Encyclopedias.

While the survey, (Hill, 2001), reviews of graded readers discussed above, provides superb resources for teachers to select books they think are appropriate to their students, more importantly we should consider how our students themselves view the books. Of course, it is very useful to receive feedback or suggestions about graded readers at the end of an ER programme, term, or year as Thomas and Hill (1993) suggest, but it will be more useful if such an examination can be done before the implementation of an ER programme, especially at the stage of book selection, because the selected books should be able to capture, attract and maintain our learners' interest in reading, and the appearance of graded readers play a crucial role in doing so (Day & Bamford, 1998). Yet, to my knowledge, learners' reflections on the physical appearance of books they have read has not been discussed in most of the research on extensive reading, except by Hafiz & Tudor (1989) who mentioned the important role of the appearance of books.

In contrast to previous survey reviews which have looked at graded readers from the expert's point of view, the present study attempts to make a first step towards reviewing graded readers through the eyes of learners. As Thomas and Hill have pointed out "it is the students' verdicts that really count" (1993, p. 265). Attention as to whether our learners are satisfied with the selected books will broaden our perspective on the use of graded readers. Moreover, since this study was a first phase in investigating issues in the introduction of extensive reading (ER) into the English language curriculum in Taiwan, it aimed at finding out how far the students were

satisfied with the physical features (i.e. title, the cover, illustrations, size of print and book, length and quality of print) of sample graded readers preparatory to book selection for a new reading project. Therefore, the research questions asked in this study were:

1. How much did the title, the cover page, and illustrations attract EFL students?
2. Were students satisfied with the length, quality of print, size of print and book?
3. What were students' overall impressions of graded readers?

Method

Participants

A total number of 33 Taiwanese junior high school students participated in this study. All of them were native speakers of Chinese aged 13-14 and had been learning English in the official time of studying for at least 1 year.

Materials

In total, 23 books of 7 series were chosen in this study (the inventory and the number of headwords included in each series are shown in Appendix 1). The choice was based mainly on the level of the language because the students participating in this study were beginners, and on the types of the stories which appear to be interesting to the participants. Although Bookworms Library (stage 1) was taken into consideration, it was finally excluded because of the adult-style, and black and white drawings which made this series less comparable, since its target audience is adult. The total number of students evaluating each book is also listed in Appendix 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through a two-stage procedure and two 40-minute lessons were allocated which allowed each student to evaluate two books. The procedure was as follows. In the first stage, the 23 books were displayed on tables and each student was given a two-part evaluation sheet whose items were constructed to elicit the information needed to explore the research questions: (1) how the title, the cover and illustrations attracted EFL learners, (2) the extent to which students were satisfied with the length, quality of print, size of print and book, and (3) what the students' overall impressions were. Then the students were asked to come to the tables and leaf through the books, and to choose one book which appeared to be interesting to them. The students were allowed to work as a group, in pairs, or individually. In the second stage, the students were given 10 minutes to look at the features of the book listed on the evaluation sheet, and then to rate their satisfaction with the books on a five-point scale of interest rating. The subjects' responses were loaded on to the computer and calculated to produce

descriptive statistics, i.e. means, using SPSS/PC 8.0, and then the data of each series and book were analysed respectively.

Results and Discussion

In the following section, a brief description of each feature is firstly presented, and then the results regarding each series are presented to correspond with the questions listed in the introduction.

The results of each individual book are shown in Appendix 2.

The Title

All readers are given a title according to the name of the main character or the plot/themes of the story. The students' reflections on the topics are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The Title

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarts)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshots Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
2.95	3.24	2.95	2.95	3.14	3.03	3.26

Note: 5=very interesting, 4=interesting, 3=about right, 2=boring, 1=boring.

As can be seen, 3 series (*Heinemann ELT Guided Readers*, *Penguin Readers Easystarts* and *Penguin Readers Level 1*) were given a rating below the satisfactory level, while *Oxford Factfiles* received the highest rating. When we looked at the rating of each book, there were 7 books whose ratings were below the satisfactory level, and among them, *Who Wants to be a Star?* (No. 7), *The Magician* (No. 15) and *The White Stone* (No. 17) were rated as the lowest. This was in accordance with Hill's (1997) view that some readers had "mediocre and poor titles" (p. 77). By contrast, the highest rating was given to *Into the Pyramid* in *Oxford Hotshots Puzzles (Level 1)*. *Free the Dolphins!* (No. 6), *New York* (no. 21) and *Brilliant!* (No. 5) were also rated highly. On the whole, the results seemed to suggest that students showed little interest in books named after the main character, but those whose theme was related to their life, or were adventure or detective stories won their favor. Moreover, the impression of *Taxi of Terror* (No. 19) and *Avalanche* (No. 13) were also negative, perhaps because of serious crimes

committed by taxi drivers in their society and their unfamiliarity with the natural phenomenon. This indicated that regional attitudes toward a particular topic or issue may influence students' impressions of the books.

The Cover Page

In Heinemann ELT Guided Readers, the editor places a drawing related to the story on the centre of the light yellow covers with the title artistically written in color at the top. *Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers* and *Penguin Readers* use the whole cover page for a picture and titles are shown at the top or at the bottom. *Oxford Hotshots Puzzles* also have pictures over the whole cover pages, but the title and authors are placed in a small green box on the upper right-hand corner. The covers of *Oxford Bookworms Starters* have in the centre a comic picture in a speech bubble and use colorful artwork for the titles. In *Oxford Factfiles,* a real photograph is placed in the center of a blue cover page, and the titles are shown in colour just below the photo. All covers are colourful and glossy, and levels/stages within the series are colour-coded. While the covers of *Oxford Bookworms Starters* are matt laminated, all other series are gloss laminated.

Table 2 shows that students welcome the style of presentation of *Oxford Factfiles* and *Penguin Readers (Level 1)*, and among them the cover pages of *Michael Jordan*, *Leonardo Di Caprio* and *New York* were given a high rating. The results suggested that a real picture (a person or a place) on the front page appeared to win students' favor. Apart from one of the books rated at an unsatisfactory level, students were also delighted with *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles*' colorful cover pages which indicate the plot of the books. Although *Oxford Bookworms Starters* uses a different form (that is, centering a picture in a speech bubble and using different colour artwork for the titles), surprisingly, students did not give a higher rating in response. This is probably because of the use of black colour in the background of its cover, and a change could make this series more attractive.

Table 2

The Cover Page

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarts)	Penguin Readers (Level) 1	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
2.95	3.18	3.16	3.53	3.46	3.42	3.58

Note: 5=very interesting, 4=interesting, 3=about right, 2=boring, 1=very boring.

By contrast, *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* and 4 books have failed the satisfactory level: *Alissa* (a picture of an African girl holding a book in her arm), the *Wrong Man* (a photo of Ayers Rock at sunset), *Who Wants to be a Star?* (a drawing of a girl singing) and *The Magician* (a man with a black face and suit). Students appeared to feel that a simple or dull drawing on the cover was boring.

Illustrations

Drawn pictures are used in *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* and *New Wave*, *Penguin Readers (Easystarts)* and *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles*; real photographs in *Penguin Readers (level 1)* and Oxford *Factfiles*; comic-strip pictures in Oxford *Bookworm Starters*.

Table 3 shows that students found the colourful comic-strip type of pictures in Oxford *Bookworms Starters* and real photographs in *Oxford Factfiles* and *Penguin Readers (Level 1)* more attractive than drawings in the other series. However, although it claims in other series' catalogues that all books have full-colour artwork, students were not impressed by the illustrations, especially *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers*, which received the lowest rating and two of its books (*Alissa* and *Sara Says No!*) were rated at the unsatisfactory level. It should be noted that the illustrations in the *Magician* (Oxford *Hotshot Puzzles*) were the least interesting, perhaps because this title contains many dark-colored pictures.

Table 3

Illustration

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarts)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
2.95	3.12	3.11	3.58	3.18	3.83	3.77

Note: 5=very interesting, 4=interesting, 3=about right, 2=boring, 1=very boring.

The Length

The average number of pages are: *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* and *New Wave*, *Penguin Readers (Easystarts)* and *Penguin Readers (Level 1)*-16; *Oxford Hotshots Puzzles*-21; *Oxford Bookworms Starters*-24; *Oxford Factfiles*-19.

On the whole, students felt that 16 pages was the most appropriate length like that of *Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers* and *Penguin Readers Easystarts* (see Table 4). However, *Oxford Factfiles* were seen as the lengthiest series, and this is not only because they have more pages than other series, but also on each page the text covers more than half of the page. Having the text on the one side of the page and a photograph on the other side, *Penguin Readers (Level 1)* was also viewed as another long series. Although the number of pages in *Oxford Bookworms Starters* are more than all the other series, the comic-strip layout with few sentences in a speech bubble has made it seem shorter in students' eyes. *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* were the shortest series, and breaking a paragraph into several sentences might be the reason for this. As Hill (1997) points out, the accessibility of a book might be influenced by its length, and it can be said that all these series are accessible and fair.

Table 4

The Length

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarts)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
2.45	2.94	2.95	3.31	2.85	2.61	3.32

Note: 5=too long, 4=a little bit long, 3=about right, 2=a little bit short, 1=too short.

Quality of Print

All series are printed by a 4-color process (magenta, cyan, yellow and black, and are glossy with art work. The quality of paper is silk of various thicknesses.

Given that the publishers have used high quality paper and high standard print technology in their graded readers, oddly, the students were not impressed by this because no series or readers were rated as having a good level of quality of print, or above (see Table 5). In contrast to the rating of other series, the rating of *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* and 4 readers (*Alissa, Brilliant!*, *Free the Dolphins!* and *The Magician*) were below the satisfactory level. This is probably because they contain many dull and grey colour pictures which cause the students to lower the rating. By contrast, *Oxford Factfiles* was given the highest rating, followed by *Oxford Bookworms Starters*. The students also rated the quality of print of *Avalanche* (No. 13) as the best,

followed by *Police TV* (No. 17) and *Animals in Danger* (No. 20). This seemed to indicate that glossy print and bright colour would impress students most favourably.

Table 5

Quality of Print

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers (Starter level)	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarters)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
3.10	2.88	3.53	3.42	3.57	3.61	3.68

Note: 5=Excellent, 4-Good, 3=Satisfactory, 2=Not so good, 1=Poor

Size of Print

The font of words used in *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers (Starter level)* is serif Times New Roman 16pt and san=serif Arial 16pt (in conversations), *Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers* serif Times New Roman 16pt, *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles* serif Times New Roman 12pt, and san-serif Arial 12pt (in puzzle questions), and *Oxford Bookworms Starters* san-serif Arial 12pt. *Penguin Readers (Easystarts)*, *Penguin Readers (Level 1)* and *Oxford Factfile* used serif Times New Roman 12pt.

As we can see in Table 6, students appreciated the serif times new Roman 16 pt used in *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* and *New Wave Readers (Starter level).* By contrast, students were less satisfied with the fonts used in other series. Such evidence should especially be taken into account in relation to the presentation of the texts which seemed to influence the students' reflection. *Penguin Readers* series is edited by using a whole page illustration on the one side and the text on the other side. The series of *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles* is edited by using a half or whole page illustrations, and texts are presented on the top, the middle or the bottom of pages. The texts in *Oxford Bookworms Starters* are inserted into the speech bubbles and captions. The texts in *Oxford Factfiles* series are presented in two columns and pictures are inserted between lines or paragraphs. All these arrangements probably make the words small and dense, and thus, the students viewed the size of font as less appropriate.

Table 6

Size of Print

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarters)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
3.00	3.24	2.63	2.47	2.46	2.56	2.58

Note: 5=too big, 4=a little big, 3=about right, 2=a little small, 1=too small.

Size of Book

The book size of *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers (Starter level)* is 128mm x 197mm, *Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers* 148mm x 210mm (A5), *Penguin Readers (Easystarts)* 129mm x 199mm, *Penguin Readers (Level 1)* 129mm x 199mm, *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles* 152mm x 217mm, *Oxford Bookworms Starters* 127mm x 197mm, and *Oxford Factfiles* 162mm x 209mm.

The results in Table 7 show that the size of *Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers*, *Oxford Hotshot Puzzles* and *Oxford Factfiles* were students' favorite size. However, the students felt that the book size of *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers (Starter level)* tended to be unsuitable. This indicated that the approximately A5 size was more appropriate than the packet-size like that of *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers*. One of the explanations was that since the most common size of textbook is 170mm x 245mm, the students were more accustomed to the large size than the small size.

Table 7

Size of Book

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarters)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
2.35	3.06	2.68	2.58	3.04	2.67	3.00

Note: 5=too big, 4=a little big, 3=about right, 2=a little small, 1=too small.

Overall Expression

On the whole, students were satisfied with all the series (see Table 8). *Oxford Factfiles, New York* (No. 21) and *Animals in Danger* (No. 23) were rated higher than other books. A high rating was also given to *Oxford Bookworms Starters, Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers*, *Michael Jordan* (No. 11) and *Free the Dolphins!* (No. 6). By contrast, *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* only just reached the satisfactory level, and the students rated *The Magician* (No. 15) as the lowest, and the rating of *Sara Says No!* (No. 3) was also below the satisfactory level. Interestingly, students' overall opinions coincided with the summary of the highest and lowest rating of each reader shown in Table 9, that is, *Oxford Factfiles* (series #7) received the highest ranking in 4 areas, but *Heinemann ELT Guided Readers* (Series #1) rated the lowest/the least appropriate level in 4 features.

Table 8

Overall Rating

Heinemann ELT Guided Readers	Heinemann ELT New Wave Readers	Penguin Readers (Easystarters)	Penguin Readers (Level 1)	Oxford Hotshot Puzzles	Oxford Bookworms Starters	Oxford Bookworms Factfiles
3.00	3.35	3.21	3.26	3.18	3.42	3.61

Note: 5=Excellent, 4=Good, 3=Satisfactory, 2=Not so good, 1=Poor.

Table 9

Rating Summary of the Series

Series	Topic	Cover Page	Illustrations	Length	Print Quality	Print Size	Book Size
1	x	x	x	x		+	x
2					x		
3	x			+			
4	x						
5						x	
6			+				
7	+	+			+		+

Note: The + is the highest/the most appropriate rating; the x is the lowest/the least appropriate rating.

Practical Suggestions for English Language Teachers

This study has investigated the effect of the physical features in students' choice of graded readers. It was on a small scale, but even so it has raised several practical suggestions that can be made to teachers who plan to select graded readers for their students. First, the teacher can get information about the strength and weakness of each series from already published reviews, and then can set up criteria for book selection. After that, they need to review the books themselves in order to select those they think are interesting to their students. Of course, teachers can visit local bookshops to do that, but whether the bookshops store all the series and books is open to question. Another way to access books and to have a personal collection as well is to request graded readers catalogues from publishers. Nowadays, all GR publishers provide a free copy of a colorful and glossy graded readers catalogue which includes detailed information about graded scheme/syllabus, the cover page, a brief description of the story, and in some cases sample pages. I personally found that looking at the catalogues helped me to know what graded readers are available and what they look like, and to select books which appeared to be appropriate in terms of title, the cover, illustrations and the level of language. Moreover, sample books, guideline books, lesson plans for teachers or teacher's handbooks are also free of charge on request. Note that catalogues and resources are also available on the Internet. All publishers offer a substantial amount of information on their web site and useful web addresses are given in Appendix 3. Finally, before purchasing all the selected books, it is necessary to ascertain whether the book selections meet learners' expectations. The best way is to select some sample books and give them to students to reflect on as this study did. Alternatively, if the Internet is available, we can ask students to choose books themselves. By doing this, teachers can decide to carry on collecting the rest of the books they are planning to acquire or to make changes eliminating any unpleasant book.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent students are satisfied with the physical features of the selected graded readers. This information is very important in two aspects, especially if we want to encourage our students to read: it can ensure that the selected books meet our students' expectations, and the students can be motivated to choose and to read the books of their choice. Moreover, this study has also revealed what approaches have succeeded in attracting learners' attention and what areas should be improved for making graded readers attractive. While some series won students' favour in many aspects in this study, it nevertheless cannot be said they were superior over the other series. But we can assume that once the physical features have met students' expectations, graded readers will find favour in learners' eyes. When

graded readers include more attractive physical features, students are more likely to pick them up to read for pleasure and continually. In this way, we can make the best of graded readers and help our learners to experience the written English world.

Since this study has only looked at the effect of physical features of several series, the results are tentative regarding the exact factors which influence their reflections. If the students had been able to express their opinions in interviews or group discussion, the desirable qualities in graded readers could be revealed. Therefore, future research should go further in detecting the exact information about what makes an interesting cover and good illustrations, and what is an appropriate font, size, length, etc. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper, a change in the level of language is one of the innovations that publishers have to make. This issue has not been treated in this study; this is very important because learners may choose a book for its appearance, but they may stop reading or read without care if they find it difficult. Therefore, future research should provide guidelines on making graded readers more acceptable and readable. While we as teachers often base our selection on our own perceptions and experience, it will be of great interest if students' and teachers' reflections are also compared. By doing this, we can realise how similar or different our opinions are from our students', so that we can select appropriate books for our learners.

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Appendix 1

The Inventory of the Selected Readers

Series	Head-words	No	Title	Number of students read	
1. Heinemann ELT Guided Readers (Starter level)	200	1	Alissa	5	20
		2	The Lost Ship	10	
		3	Sara Says No!	5	
2. Heinemann New Wave Readers (level 1)	300	4	Fire!	6	17
		5	Brilliant!	6	
		6	Free The Dolphins	5	
3. Penguin Readers (Easystarts)	200	7	Who Wants to be a Star?	3	19
		8	Anita's Big Day	8	
		9	The Tory Stone	8	
4. Penguin Readers (Level 1)	300	10	The Wrong Man	5	19
		11	Michael Jordan	8	
		1	Leonardo DiCaprio	6	
5. Oxford Hotshot Puzzles (Level 1)	200	13	Avalanche	11	28
		14	The Thursday Thief	6	
		15	The Magician	3	
		16	Into the Pyramid	8	
6. Oxford Bookworms Starters	250	17	The White Stones	4	36
		18	Escape	10	
		19	Taxi of Terror	12	
		20	Police TV	10	
7. Oxford Factfiles (Stage 1)	400	21	New York	8	31
		22	London	13	
		23	Animals in Danger	10	

Note: In the table the term "headword" means the stem form of a word family which also includes its "closely related inflected, derived and abbreviated forms" (Nation & Wang, 1999, p. 358). For example, the world family beauty includes the headword beauty and the family members beauties, beautiful and beautifully.

Appendix 2

The Summary of Rating of Graded Readers

Book	Topic	Cover Page	Illustrations	Length	Print Quality	Print Size	Book Size	Overall Rating
1	3.00	x2.50	2.80	2.60	2.80	+3.00	2.50	3.00
2	3.10	3.30	3.10	x2.40	3.20	2.90	x2.20	3.10
3	2.80	3.00	2.80	x2.40	3.20	3.20	x2.20	2.80
4	3.00	3.00	3.17	+3.00	3.00	+3.00	+3.00	3.00
5	3.33	3.33	3.33	2.83	2.83	3.33	3.17	3.50
6	3.40	3.20	2.80	+3.00	2.80	3.40	+3.00	3.60
7	x2.67	2.67	3.00	2.67	3.67	2.67	2.67	3.00
8	3.00	3.00	3.00	+3.00	3.50	2.75	2.63	3.00
9	3.00	3.50	3.25	+3.00	3.67	2.50	2.75	3.50
10	3.00	2.60	3.40	3.40	3.40	2.60	2.60	3.00
11	3.00	+4.00	3.67	3.33	3.50	2.67	2.67	3.67
12	2.88	3.75	3.63	3.25	3.25	2.25	2.50	3.13
13	2.91	3.55	3.27	2.82	+2.82	2.55	3.09	3.18
14	3.71	3.50	3.17	2.83	3.50	x2.33	+3.00	3.17
15	x2.67	2.67	x2.67	+3.00	x2.67	x2.33	3.33	x2.67
16	+3.63	3.63	3.25	2.88	3.63	2.50	2.88	3.38
17	2.75	3.50	4.00	2.75	3.25	2.70	2.75	3.25
18	3.10	3.42	3.70	2.80	3.60	2.50	2.80	3.40
19	2.92	3.40	+4.17	2.85	3.58	2.58	2.58	3.42
20	3.20	3.42	3.50	x2.40	3.80	2.50	2.60	3.50
21	3.38	3.75	3.88	3.38	3.63	2.75	2.67	+3.88
22	3.23	3.54	3.62	2.85	3.62	2.45	+3.00	3.39
23	3.20	3.50	3.90	2.90	3.80	2.60	2.88	3.70

Note: The + is the highest/the most appropriate rating; the x is the lowest/the least appropriate rating.

Appendix 3

Web Site Addresses of Publishers of Graded Readers

Publisher	Web Address
The Bournemouth English Book Centre (BEBC)	http://www.bebc.co.uk
Cambridge University Press	http://www.cambridge.org/elt/readers
Express Publishing	http://www.expresspublishing.co.uk
Macmillan Heinemann Education	http://www.onestopenglish.com/bookandcourses/readers
Oxford University Press	http://www.oup.com/elt/global/teachersclub/products/readers
Penguin Longman Publishing	http://www.penguinreaders.com
Richmond Publishing	http://www.richpub.co.uk

Sensitising English Language Teachers to Time and Tense Through the Use of Humour

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Introduction

Something which confounds many English language teachers is the now well-argued case for the fact that English has only two formal "tenses"—past and present. These two tenses, together with the English aspectual system, cause consternation among many English language teachers. Lewis, in a short piece in an old edition of the *EFL Gazette* (1983), commented on how few English language teachers know the difference between tense, aspect, and mood in English, and how few feel they ought to know the difference; points which he develops in his later work (see for example, Lewis, 1994).

Much has been written recently about the English tense and aspectual system (Leech, 1978; Close 1992; Batstone, 1994), with some of Michael Lewis's work (in particular *The English Verb*, 1994) conceptualising very clearly the notions with regard to time, tense, aspect, and modality in English. What Lewis attempts to do in much of his work is to generalise concepts and categories which are often treated—or explained—by teachers to their students as numerous sub-rules falling under higher concepts, or as exceptions to the "rule" which need to be learnt.

Despite the arguments presented for the English tense system, it is nonetheless difficult (certainly in Hong Kong) to get English teachers to believe that English does not in fact have as many tenses as Spanish or German (or even Latin!). Reference to future time in English is expressed not simply as the inappropriately-named "future tense" of "will plus base form of the verb" but by the English aspectual and modal systems.

As "interesting" as this concept may be to experienced teacher trainers or to teachers with a bent for linguistics, sessions on different aspects of language systems are too often presented rather dryly—usually from a rather theoretical standpoint. Consequently, they often fail to make an impression, or worse, to rouse trainees' interest at all. I have been experimenting with using humour as an introduction to the topic, in an attempt to get around this "linguistic impasse." Chiasson (2002), in a

recent article on the use of humour in the second language classroom, hits the nail on the head with a quote by Dickinson (2001): "Classrooms in which laughter is welcome help bring learning to life." In the introduction to this book on humour in the classroom, Medgyes (2000)) also suggests that jokes and humour are an effective way of helping students remember key concepts. I concur very much with these two writers, and would suggest that humour can be equally as useful in teacher training.

The thrust of this article is, about a practical session where I use humour as an introduction to sensitising trainees to time and tense in English. In order to orient the reader, however, I will briefly discuss the concepts involved in time and tense before I describe the content of the session.

A key distinction concerning present and past time which Lewis makes (1994: 69-74) relates to the concept of immediacy/remoteness. This distinction is what essentially "conditions" a speaker to use present tense or past tense:

* *temporal distance*	the generally understood difference between present and past as "now" and "then"
* *social distance*	as with explanations about politeness: that "could" is more polite than "can," for example
* *psychological distance*	as with the immediacy perceived in story, or joke, telling (the "historic present") or making an event appear more "vivid"
* *hypothetical distances*	with "will" for the first conditional ("likely") and "would" for the second conditional ("unlikely"); "wish" as in "I wish that Ferrari belonged to me."

The Practice Session

I will now describe a practical session to lead trainee English language teachers (1) towards the issues of time, tense, and aspect. There are three activities here: the first involves a joke, the second and third involve acted-out scenarios.

Prior to the activities, as a warm-up, I ask teachers, in groups or pairs, to write down how many verb tenses they think English has, and to give me an example for each tense.

Activity One

I then ask teachers to put aside the work on tenses they've just been looking at. They should sit back and relax; I'm going to tell them two jokes. There is a linguistic point to the exercise, however, I tell them I'm going to tell the two jokes rather differently, and (apart from hopefully finding the jokes funny) they have to work out how the language of the two jokes is different.

I have experimented with different types of jokes here. One type of joke that lends itself quite well are those of the "three nationalities" variety. If this type of joke is known in your trainees' culture, you're all right. If it isn't, then you need to get them to appreciate the idea that things tend to get worse as the joke progresses through the characters. (It's also important that in one of the jokes your own nationality is the butt of the joke—otherwise things may seem a bit racist). This year, I tried some less nationality-bound jokes and experimented with that well-known international statesman, George W. Bush. My teachers found these jokes easier to accept. I include the two jokes below.

George W. Bush I (Past tense)

George W. Bush, Albert Einstein, and Pablo Picasso had all died. Due to some problems with the celestial time-space continuum mechanism, all three arrived at the Pearly Gates more or less at the same time, even though their deaths had taken place decades apart. The first to present himself to Saint Peter was Einstein. Saint Peter questioned him.

Saint Peter told Einstein that he looked like Einstein, but that he had no idea the things some people would do, to try and sneak into Heaven under false pretenses. He asked Einstein if he could prove who he really was. Einstein pondered for a few seconds and asked Saint Peter if he could have a blackboard and some chalk. Saint Peter complied with the snap of his fingers. The blackboard and chalk appeared instantly. Einstein then proceeded to describe with weird and wonderful mathematics and symbols his special theory of relativity. Saint Peter was very impressed, and told Einstein that he was sure that he really was Einstein. He welcomed Einstein to heaven.

The next to arrive was Picasso. Once again Saint Peter asked for his credentials. Picasso didn't hesitate. He asked if Saint Peter minded if he used the blackboard and chalk that Einstein had used. Saint Peter told Picasso to go ahead. Picasso rubbed out Einstein's formulas and proceeded to sketch out a truly amazing

drawing. Bulls, landscapes, women: he captured their essences with just a few strokes of the chalk. Saint Peter clapped and told Picasso that he really was the great artist he claimed to be. He told him to come on in.

The last to arrive was George W. Bush. Saint Peter scratched his head. He said to Bush that Einstein and Picasso had both managed to prove their identity. He asked Bush how he could prove his. Bush looked really confused. He asked Saint Peter who Einstein and Picasso were. Saint Peter sighed and told Bush to come on in.

George W. Bush 2 (Present tense)

George W. Bush calls his vice president Dick Cheney on the phone with a problem. It's quite early in the morning, so Cheney asks him what the problem is.

Bush tells Cheney that he's bought this jigsaw puzzle, but it's too hard. None of the pieces fit together and he can't see how to do the puzzle. He's been struggling with it ever since he got up, but he just can't seem to see how it's all supposed to fit together.

"What's the picture of?", Cheney asks.

"It's of a great big chicken," Bush replies.

Cheney tells Bush not to worry, says he'll come right over and have a look, see if they can figure it out together.

When Cheney arrives, Bush thanks him for coming over and leads him over to the kitchen table where he has it laid out. Cheney takes one look at what Bush has been struggling with and says, "Oh, for Heaven sake, George, put the cornflakes back in the box!"

The first joke has to be told all in the past tense, with no direct speech, all dialogue reported, tenses back-shifted etc. The second joke has to be told, as most jokes are, completely in the present tense ("psychological distance," in Lewis's term). If there is dialogue, this should also be in the present tense. Ideally, both jokes should take about the same time to tell—a couple of minutes at most. The second joke is a bit shorter than the first; this didn't matter, I found.

After each joke, I stop and see if students have got the punch line. (If they haven't, I give them a couple of clues). After finishing the second joke, I ask them which they found funnier—invariably, it will be the second.

From this, I then lead them back to the (slightly boring perhaps!) linguistic purpose of how the jokes were different. I get them to discuss this in groups, telling them to

ignore things like gesture, local context etc. It's only rarely that I have found that they can actually pinpoint the tense difference. Often they'll say things like "direct speech," "short sentences;" this, however, is a good enough lead towards bringing out the two-tense distinction. What I have done at times, is to tape-record the two jokes so that I can play back snippets. (You have to be careful here though, as you don't want to completely kill the jokes!)

Activity Two

We now move to the next activity. (Note that I am not yet ready to formally start discussing time and tense). The objective here concerns social distance, or politeness, in teachers' terms. I set the scene by telling my teachers that they are on holiday in London. They are looking for Big Ben, the clock, but are lost. A policeman passing by stops and asks if he can help. They have to ask him for directions. As this stage, I put on a UK bobby's helmet (picked up in a souvenir shop in Oxford Street while on holiday), rock on my heels an say:

"Good morning, miss. You appear to be having a problem. Are you lost?"

The teacher I address this to will inevitably say something like:

"Yes, I am. Em, could you tell me the way to Big Ben?"

At this point, I stop, take off my bobby's helmet and say "Right, same scenario—you're a tourist in London, looking for Big Ben, and you're lost. This time a young 10-year old boy comes up to you. You have to ask for directions again."

I now put on one of my 10-year old son's cap (backwards of course), get down on my knees (so that my eye level is lower than theirs), and start making noises, playing with one of his toy cars.

"Hello, miss. Looks like you're be having a problem. Are you lost?"

This brings out a response from one of my teachers such as:

"Yes, I am. Em, can you tell me the way to Big Ben?"

Activity Three

This brings us to the final activity—which concerns indirect speech, although I don't tell my teachers as such. In this activity, I whisper something in one teacher's ear, then move to the back of the class and prompt someone—who obviously hadn't been able to hear what I whispered—to ask "What did he say?" The teacher I whispered the sentence to then has to report (in whatever way she feels fit) to the other person across the class what I said to her. Below are a couple of the sentences I whisper and common ways of reporting them.

Whispered sentence	*Commonly reported as . . .*
"My son's getting married in April."	"He said his son's getting married in April."
"My daughter's having a baby at Christmas."	"He said his daughter's having a baby at Christmas."
"My father died last Easter."	"He said his father had died last Easter."
"I'm getting divorced in January."	"He said he was getting divorced in January."

You can see that "good news" (marriage, having a baby etc.) tends to be reported in the present tense (*immediacy*—the speaker is happy to be the bidder of good news) whereas bad news (divorce, death) tends to be reported in the past tense (the speaker would prefer to be more *remote* from such pieces of news).

We have now concluded the presentation activities and the scene is finally set for a more formal examination of the *immediacy/remoteness* concept, and how this links in with present and past tense. The point of the jokes is that these are told in the present tense, not because of the so-called "historic present" (e.g., the *Communicative Grammar of English* (Leech and Svartik, 1973: 69) but because giving immediacy to a joke tends to increase its chance of people considering if funny (and hence getting a laugh). Politeness can be understood in the same manner, as can the reporting of events. It is now time to take feedback on how many verb tenses teachers identified at the start of the session. Answers here vary up to as many as 24, depending on whether teachers have counted conditions, passives etc. as verb tenses. The stage is now set to move ahead and try and convince them that in fact there are only two tenses.

As homework, once we have examined the simple/continuous aspectual contrast, teachers are given a task. Firstly, this involved identifying—in at least two teachers' reference grammars—the "uses" of the "present simple tense" as they are laid out in the grammar books. Common descriptive labels here are "general truth," "universal time," "present event," "habit," "talking about planned events in the future" etc. Secondly, they have to attempt to relate (to "generalise" in Lewis's terms) the different uses to:

* the sense of *immediacy* that present tense conveys
* the sense of *complete, permanent, fact* that simple aspect encapsulates

Conclusion

This article has described a series of language awareness activities designed to get English language teachers to consider the important notions of time, tense and aspect in English and to adopt a more contemporary framework for describing these notions. The activities described are usually found to be engaging and entertaining by teachers, although the latter is of course not the primary purpose. They serve as a thought-provoking lead-in to get English language teachers to consider aspects of English language as currently described and accepted. Accepting the notion that English only has two tenses is not easy for many English language teachers who have been brought up with the paradigm of a "matrix" of past, present, future tenses overlaid with perfect, continuous and conditionals. By a series of engaging activities, I would suggest that the concept of "distance," as it relates to tense, can be made much more accessible than an initial formal lecture on the subject.

Note: (1) The teachers were all local Hong Kong Chinese degree holders enrolled in a Post Graduate Diploma in Education programme at a university in Hong Kong.

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Conference Announcements

JALT CALL SIG. June 4-6, 2004. 9th Annual Conference—JALTCALL 2004, "Human Computer Interaction," Tokiwa University, Mito, Japan. Contact: Annette Karseras, Conference Chair. E-mail:conf-chair@jaltcall.org. Http://jaltcall.org/call2004.

Teachers of English. June 10-16, 2004. Annual Conference for Teachers of English 2004. "Reflective Teaching," Dominican Republic, West Indies, Instituto Cultural Dominico Americano, Abraham Lincoln Ave. #21. Santo Domingo, D. R. Contact: Grisel Del Rosario. Tel. 809-535-0665 ext. 265-264. E-mail:idiomas@icda.edu. do Santiago Location: Avendia Estrella Sadhala, Santiago, June 15-16, 2004. Contact: Agustin Francisco. Tel. 809 582 6627. E-mail:agustin_efco @hotmail.com. Http://www.icda.edu.do/.

Far Eastern English Language Teachers' Association (FEELTA). June 24-27, 2004. The Fifth Pan-Asian Conference on Language Teaching at FEELTA 2004, "Sharing Challenges, Sharing Solutions: Teaching Languages in Diverse Contexts, "Vladivostok, Russia. Http://www.dvgu.ru/rus /partner/education/feelta/pac5/.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL). June, 25-27, 2004. 2004 Academy, San Diego, California, USA. Contact: TESOL, 700 South Washington Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Fax: 703-836-7864. E-mail:edprograms@tesol.org. Http://tesol.org/.

Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE), Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), Primary English Teaching Association (PETA), National English, ESL and Literacy . July 4-7, 2004. Conference, "Get Real...and all that Spiel" in conjunction with AATE, ALEA and PETA, Sydney, Australia. Contact: ICMS Australasia Pty Ltd 234 George Street, Sydney, NSW Australia 2000. Tel. 61-2-9241-1478. Fax: 61-2-9251-3552. E-mail:info@getreal2004.com Http://www.getreal2004.com/.

Individual Differences and Teaching Style

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Summary

This paper reports on the use of MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator) and multiple intelligences (MI) (Gardner, 1993) theory in one course of several intending to prepare university seniors in Japan for language teaching careers.

To demonstrate the influence of individual differences on teaching style, students self-assessed their Myers-Briggs type, were grouped into similar-Myers-Briggs type groups, and then created jointly with groupmates an EFL lesson plan where they were asked to incorporate into the lesson tasks and activities calling upon a variety of MI. After lesson plans were completed, the lessons were evaluated/contrasted by everyone in the class. Subsequently, students commented on the process of learning about MBTI and MI and of creating a lesson in similar-type groups.

Purpose and Rationale

The MBTI and MI encourage self-understanding of one's intellectual strengths and weaknesses, and appreciation of others' differing gifts. It was hoped that by introducing students to MI and MBTI, students would gain an understanding of how their individual preferences influence their teaching style. Another aim was to foster understanding and appreciation of teaching and learning styles different from their own. A goal was to develop the concept that each kind of teacher or student has differing talents that can be encouraged and utilized in a classroom setting, rather than a fixed idea of what a "good" or "bad" teacher or "good" or "bad" student is.

Cultural Background

It is commonly believed that traditional Japanese classrooms tend to emphasize an instructional approach which is well-organized and teacher-centered. Although of course many exceptions exist, a common image of an English as a foreign language course at the pre-university stage in Japan is a course focusing especially on memorization of lexical items and grammatical rules and utilizing translation in order to help students pass multiple choice paper tests emphasizing linguistic accuracy, a required part of college entrance examinations (see e.g. Bronner, 2000; Gorsuch, 1998; Guest, 2000; Higgins and Tanaka, 1999; Tsukada, 2001; and Raush, 2000). However, one

who observes EFL courses taught by Japanese teachers may find some attempts to incorporate communicative teaching methodology, often blended with a more traditional approach aimed at satisfying the need for students to do well on entrance tests. (It should be noted that oral proficiency is not tested on entrance tests, but some teachers wish to attempt to alleviate the problem of students not attaining oral proficiency in English despite many years of language study, or make a course appealing to students by including oral practice. Other than the influence of entrance tests, another reason for less focus on oral proficiency may be, in some cases, the teacher's own deficits in oral proficiency.)

Brief Overview of MI and MBTI

Gardener's (1993) MI theory posits various kinds of intelligences, all of which are considered valuable and important. The intelligences introduced to students in this course were the following:

Linguistic (verbal ability)

Logical-mathematical (use of numbers and reasoning)

Visual-spatial (spatial sense; drawing, designing, and arranging)

Bodily-kinesthetic (movement; use of one's body, as in sports or dancing)

Musical (appreciation for and/or skilled in music)

Interpersonal (ability to work with others)

Intrapersonal intelligence (self-understanding)

Naturalist intelligence (noticing and ability to classify the natural world)

The MBTI is a psychological assessment instrument based on C. G. Jung's theory of psychological types. It contains four indices which describe what people notice and how they develop conclusions regarding their perceptions. The four indices are as follows (Myers and McCaulley, 1985; Fairhurst and Fairhurst, 1995):

Source of Energy

EI Extraversion/introversion E—feel energized when they are with others
I—feel energized when they are alone

Processes of Perception

SN Sensing/iNtuition S—perception based upon the 5 senses
N—perception based on intuitively grasped meanings, relationships and possibilities

Processes of Judgement/Evaluation

TF Thinking/Feeling — T—decision based logical consequences
F—decision based on personal/social values

Style of Dealing With the Outside World

JP Judging/Perceiving — J—preference for using T/F to deal with the outer world (likes to come to a conclusion)
P—preference for using S/N to deal with the outer world (preference for taking information)

The four indices can be seen as continua. In other words, a person could be highly, moderately, or slightly extraverted or introverted, sensing or intuiting, thinking/feeling, or judging/perceiving.

One's Myers Briggs type can be represented by choosing one item from each index that best describes oneself. For example, an ENFP is a person who is Extraverted, Intuitive, Feeling and Perceiving.

While one's Myers-Brigg type is thought to reflect inborn psychological preferences, life experience and cultural factors are thought to influence one's type or the expression of it. For example, introversion appears to be socially-sanctioned in both Japanese and Korean cultures (Horikoshi, 1996; Park, 1996). In Japan, one could say an attention to details and appearances and respect for orderliness and tradition is also favored, in other words a sensing-judging orientation would also appear to be socially sanctioned (for readers interested in a fuller introduction to Japanese cultural attributes, Sugimoto, 1997and Gudykunst and Nishida, 1994 are some recommended sources).

Student Introduction to MBTI and MI and Self Assessment of Myers Briggs Type

Students were introduced to MI theory through reading (excerpts from Kagan and Kagan, 1998; and Brown, 1980), lecture, and group work as well as to Myers-Brigg types through readings (excerpts from Brown, 1980; Lawrence, 1993; and Fairhurst and Fairhurst, 1995), lecture and group work.

Following these activities, the 16 students enrolled in the course were asked to self-assess their own Myers-Briggs type.

The results were as follows:

INFP, five students
ISFP, three students
ISFJ, three students
ESFJ, two students

ESFP, one student INFJ, one student

ISTP, one student

It can be noted that the class was dominated by feeling types (15/16), introverts (13/16), sensing types (10/16), and perceiving types (10/16). All students were female except for one ISFP student.

Grouping of Students for the Lesson Plan Activity

The goal was to make 3 or 4 groups of about equal size in order to have teams of 3-4 students considered ideal in size for a cooperative peer group (small groups are favored in classrooms utilizing a cooperative learning approach as this one did; for more information on the use of small groups in cooperative learning classrooms, see, e.g., Johnson Johnson and Holubec, 1998).

Although cooperative learning practice emphasizes the use of heterogenous groups, similar-type was the grouping criteria. The rationale was that similar-type groups would create distinct lessons which could later be compared profitably with the lesson plans of other similar-type groups. In other words, type differences were expected to lead to differences in the content and style of the lesson plans and these differences were predicted to be noticeable and contrastable.

Our class grouping ended up as follows:

Group 1—IN(F) group: INFP (5 students); INFJ (one student)

Group 2—S(F)J group: ISFJ (3 students); ESFJ (two students)

Group 3—SP group: ISFP (3 students); ISTP (one student) [ESFP (one student) absent on the group formation and lesson plan creation days]

Since only one extraverted student was present on the day we created the groups, an "extraverted" group could not be created. Similarly, since there was only one student with a Thinking preference and only one NJ student, T and NJ preferences could not be used as criteria for similar-type groups.

Lesson Plan Activity

Overview

After grouping students as explained above, students were given a handout that contained four possible prompts for an English lesson. Each group was instructed to choose one of the four materials and then to base an EFL lesson on the materials (a) keeping in mind a potential student class diverse in terms of MI and (b) attempting to consciously incorporate into the lesson as many MI as possible/reasonable.

Two of the prompts were English song lyrics "Wonderful World" (Cooke, 1960) and "Mother" (Lennon, 1970). Another prompt was a short English contemporary poem and the 4th prompt was a short comic strip teaching young people to protect themselves from STDs/HIV infection. The two songs were played for the class in the event any group was to choose either of them for the lesson plan activity and wanted to be familiar with the music. All groups chose one of the two songs as the springboard for their lesson.

The groups were instructed to, when ready or the time was up, write down the lesson plan created by the group and be able to tell for whom the lesson was intended (e.g., 2nd year Japanese junior high school students, 3rd year high school students studying Japanese in Australia, etc.). They were also instructed to tell approximately how many minutes they thought would be needed for students to complete the lesson their group created.

The next step was for each group to make a final copy of the lesson plan on a large piece of paper (one paper per group) using paper and a colored pencil set and erasers provided by the teacher.

Time Required

Grouping the students by type, explaining the lesson plan activity, and having groups create and write down their lesson required two 90 minute class periods in consecutive weeks. (MI and MBTI were explained in previous weeks). An additional 90 minute period was required for students to respond to a questionnaire about the activity upon its completion.

It was noticed that the SP group seemed to finish the lesson plan activity by the end of the second class meeting, while NF and SJ groups stayed a few extra minutes (roughly 15 minutes into the lunch hour) to finish putting the lesson plan to paper.

Post-Activity Questionnaire

After completing the lesson plans, students received photocopies of all lessons and a questionnaire (see Appendix A). Because the photocopied lessons were black and white versus color copies, the original lesson plans were passed around from student to student for inspection and then hung on a classroom wall for viewing so that students could also notice not just differences in the content of the lessons, but differences in the way the lessons were reproduced on paper including colors used.

Predictions About Lesson Plans Based on Student Self-reported MBTI Type

Below I will describe my predictions about each group's lesson plan, considering the MBTI types of the students in each group. The information about Myers Briggs types upon which I based my predictions and later analyzed the lessons may be found in Lawrence, 1993; Fairhurst and Fairhurst, 1995; Pearman and Albritton, 1997; and Myers and McCaulley, 1985.

Group 1

This group contained all the intuitive students in the class. All students in this group also had preferences for feeling and introversion, and all but one for perception.

Intuitive learners like innovation and tend to dislike repetitiveness, memorization, and routine. They are often comfortable with abstraction and symbolism and are good with language. They tend to grasp "the big picture" rather than be concerned with details.

NFs are thought to be enthusiastic, insightful and non-conformist. Introverted students tend to be introspective. Feeling students are believed to make decisions based on their personal values, more so than on impartial reason.

Perceiving students are believed to like to explore many possibilities and gather a lot of information. NPs are believed to like activities which are open-ended and allow for spontaneity; NFPs are thought to especially value personal freedom; INFPs are thought to enjoy tasks in which they can use their inspiration.

It was predicted based on this information that this group's lesson would be nontraditional and emphasize engaging the creativity and imagination of the students in relatively open-ended activities.

Group 2

Sensing and judging distinguished Group 2 from Group 1 and Group 3 (the sensing and perceiving group). The ratio of introverted to extraverted students in this group was 3:1 for the group and lesson creation class meetings (3:2 for the subsequent period that included evaluation of the lessons).

SJ students would be expected to prefer lessons based on known facts rather than abstract possibilities. The combination of S and J would suggest a preference for order, a command of fact and skills, (a high degree of) structure, tradition, conservatism, linearity, and patience with details and routine. SJ teachers "prefer to use tried and true methodology and often model their teaching style on traditional

techniques they experienced as students" (Fairhurst and Fairhurst, 1995; p. 41). SJs are believed to be good with details.

All students in this group reported a preference for feeling (as was true of group 1). Both STJS and SFJs reportedly prefer having the teacher tell them what is "correct," and having the teacher provide a well thought out and structured plan for students to follow, but the F preference might result in allowing for some student choice and self-expression compared to an STJ preference. ISFJs are often characterized as "obedient."

It was predicted that this group's lesson would be the most traditional, teacher-centered, orderly, linear, and accuracy-oriented due to the SJ preference, but due to the F preference allowing for some student self-expression and showing concern for students.

Group 3

An SP orientation distinguished this group from the others. Additionally, four of the five students in this group reported a preference for introversion, and four for feeling versus thinking.

The S preference reflects an interest in immediate, sensory experience, while the P preference indicates curiosity and adaptability. S types (including students of both groups 2 and 3) reportedly are good at precise work (especially if they are also introverted) including memorization and other accuracy-oriented tasks. They can often work steadily in a step-by-step way and may be viewed as more practical and careful than intuitives. Sensing students are thought to prefer instruction that has an identifiable connection to the real world. They are assumed to like "hands on" kind of tasks. The P preference suggests Group 3 students would like "discovery" tasks and the chance to follow impulses.

SPs are believed to be especially astute observers of the sensory world and who might prefer sensory-rich instruction and be good with tools and materials. They also are thought to like variety, physical mobility, and risk taking. Introverted SPs might be expected to be especially good at drawing and model-making.

It was expected that Group 3's lesson would be less traditional in style than Group 2's, but more so than Group 1's. It would be more "down to earth" or practical than group 1's, but allowing more creativity, especially creativity which would involve the senses and skills such as drawing, than Group 2's.

Analysis of Lesson Plans

Visual Appearance of the Lesson Plans

The SP (Group 3) lesson plan used ten different colors, contained about ten drawings/symbols, and was easy to read. The SJ (Group 2) lesson used only three colors and had no drawings; it was easily the plainest of the three visually. The NF (Group 1) lesson used five colors and few drawings/symbols other than a simple box and a star. We might infer that the SP preference for exploring possibilities within immediate, sensory experience resulted in the stronger visual impact compared to the other two lessons, whereas the SJ preference could be seen as having resulted in a no-frills, business like and matter of fact presentation style.

Content of the Lesson Plans

Group 1's Lesson

This lesson focused on the students' subjective contributions versus teacher input. Indeed the teacher's input is not required whatsoever during execution of this lesson. Unlike the other two lessons, there is no emphasis on linguistic accuracy. Rather than emphasizing details, students make a summary of the song in groups of three. Next, student ideas are collected, but not checked for "accuracy". Students freely choose from a list of ideas, many of which are abstract (e.g. love, wisdom, peace) and reflect on their choice. Finally, they make poems and share the poems with others.

This lesson emphasizes the creativity and innovation of students, which we might expect from a type characteristically concerned with fostering student growth and potential, self-expression, creativity, symbolism, and flexibility.

Group 2's Lesson

As was predicted, the SJ lesson contained traditional (for Japanese foreign language teaching) instructional elements such as choral practice, grammar explanations, translation, and a focus on accuracy. The first step of the lesson is a traditional warm up activity where the students are invited to imagine what the song is about before listening to it. The middle steps of the lesson, focusing on accuracy and grammatical forms, help guide the students' interpretations of the song. Toward the end of the lesson (after grammatical explanations and translation of lyrics) students discuss first in small groups, then with the whole class, the meaning of the song. Thus we can find a linear pattern beginning with the students' initial guessing about the meaning of the song and ending with the students' revised, informed response which has been influenced by teacher-led accuracy-focused activities.

Interestingly and not surprisingly given an SJ preference for doing things in a clear established order, Group 2 added the caveat that students would have already have learned adverbs and relative pronouns before undertaking this lesson.

Group 3's Lesson

The SP lesson contained more traditional elements such as translation, choral singing, and a listening cloze, but asked students to draw their impression of the song twice with colored pencils. It combines accuracy-focused activities (but which may initially involve guessing) such as cloze, and translation, with hands-on creative, sensory activities involving drawing. As in Group 2's lesson, student's creative output is solicited twice, the second time as a revised impression following teacher-led, accuracy-focused comprehension activities. As with Group 2's lesson, the lesson begins with students first listening without any explanation, and ends with choral singing. Students being given the chance to check answers with classmates before checking with the teacher in the 4th step of the plan allows some discovery learning and more learner—(v. teacher) input, as do the drawing activities. Teacher and students are responsible for explaining the meaning of different stanzas.

In sum, this lesson blended traditional (e.g. teacher-led translation, choral response) and nontraditional (student-centered) elements including drawing, as predicted by the dominant personality types.

Student Comments Regarding the Project Revealed in Written Answers to Questionnaires

Group 1 Student Comments

Nearly all students in this group said they wished for more time to work on their lesson which was not a surprise, both given their types (five of six were INFPs who we would expect to be introspective and want to explore many possibilities before coming to a conclusion), and having observed them work on the lesson in class (as noted above, only the SP group appeared to finish on time; the other two groups stayed some minutes over into the lunch hour to work a little bit more). Members described teamwork in the group as either fair or good. About whether it was difficult to do this activity, one wrote: "Yes, it was. We took for a long time to come up what we do next, because we hoped to make more interesting lesson." Another wrote "I thought it was difficult to make the lesson which is able to attract students". Significant may be the students' desire to make an interesting lesson; in other words, their belief that instruction should be fun (or their idea of fun).

As far as their own view of the strong points of their lesson, students mentioned such things as students would get an overview (versus a focus on details) and the chance to express themselves. One wrote:

> In Japan, there are many English lessons that many students copy the blackboard and they don't have the chance to speak English inspite of English lessons. In our lesson, students have the chance to listen, speak, read and write English. And they make poems. It's important to create.

Another wrote:

> Students don't read and translate mainly, but think the summary of this material and their minds deeply.

As far as the weak points of their lesson, answers varied. One student mentioned students would not learn about grammar from this lesson. Another said there should be more speaking and reading required of students. Another said it may be difficult for students to write a poem with the last line stipulated. As far as the value for students of their lesson, most students emphasized the lesson allowing for self-expression of students.

Regarding the good points of other group's lessons, some students said that although they didn't like it personally, Group 2's lesson might be good for some students and/or useful for entrance test preparation. The drawing activity of Group 3's lesson was popular. Others commented on what they saw as a beneficial variety of activities included in both of the other groups' lessons.

All students in this group commented that they believed it was easier to collaborate with teachers of the same type (since they would have similar thinking), but that it is beneficial to work with teachers of a different type in order to obtain more varied input to create a stronger or better lesson.

Group 2 Student Comments

All students in this group commented that making the lesson plan was a challenging activity. The reasons they gave for his were different, however, such as wanting to teach the song's connotation to students was difficult to do, keeping in mind different kinds of students was difficult, or because group members hesitated before giving opinions. One student cited her inexperience as a teacher as making the task difficult. However, all members described the group's teamwork skill as "good" except for one who described it as "fair." Member opinions as to whether they had enough time to complete the activity varied, but most seemed to say they had enough

thinking time though some wanted more time simply to commit the lesson to paper or go over finer details with the group. This did not surprise me as SJs characteristically like to reach decisions and come to conclusions quickly, but are also more detailed oriented and concerned with getting those details right.

While all of Group 1's students said they believed they would themselves enjoy the lesson they created if they were the student, the answers of Group 2 were "no" (1 student); "yes and no" (1 student); and "yes" (3). This could suggest that making a fun lesson was not necessarily as fundamental a goal compared with Group 1.

All students in this group noted different strong/weak points in their lesson. Good points in their view included the variety of activities, trying to take into account learner differences, including student guessing and discussion as activities, and an accuracy focus. Weak points included that translation might be boring or that the students might soon forget the lesson content. As far as the chief value of their lesson, most students noted such things as the variety of activities, and that students could also guess and/or use the imaginations a little.

As far as what they liked about other group's lessons, all members commented on the creative aspects of the other two, either the poem writing activity of group 1's lesson or drawing activity of Group 3's lesson.

As far as collaborating with teachers of the same v. different type, as with Group 1 students thought that working with the same type of person is easier, but that working with someone with a different personality may lead to a more varied lesson. One mentioned that discussions in a mixed group might be difficult, but worthwhile.

Group 3 Student Comments

Two students in this group believed this activity was not difficult. A third said it was a little difficult and a fourth said it was difficult to consider various types of students. All noted that they had good teamwork and one noted (as the teacher did) that this group was the first to finish. All said they had enough class time to complete the activity.

Strong points they noticed were the painting activity and that the lesson took into account various kinds of student personalities and abilities. Weak points noted by students varied and included omission of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, students should compare their paintings with each other, and that the lesson was a little vague. All members said they would enjoy the lesson themselves as the student, or at least the parts which involved listening to music and painting.

As far as what they liked about the other group's lessons, two students mentioned the poems, one said the grammar focus of Group 2's and the 4th said discussion.

Most students said it was easier to create a lesson with teachers of the same type, but better to work with teachers of different types to get more varied ideas. However, one student said that it is better to create a lesson with someone of the same personality type, because otherwise the lesson might be confusing for students.

General Comments from Students of all Groups

As far as what governed the group's choice of the material, the comments of group members focused on the chosen material being the easiest to understand, the easiest to work with, or that they liked the music or thought students would like the music/words of the song.

Nearly every student in the class commented that it was important for the teacher to consider a student's personality and various abilities (MBTI and MI) when planning lessons; only one student disagreed, saying to consider MI is not important/is difficult.

At the end of the term, students anonymously answered questions in an overall course evaluation. Students rated the course highly, particularly this activity and the discussions about MBTI which they claimed to be enlightening and helped to shape a new view for them about learners. Students also reported that this course contained their first introduction to the theories of MI and Myers-Briggs psychological types.

Conclusion

It appears that students found the project useful and important as a possible way of understanding themselves and their students, and keeping in mind the goal of being aware of and even trying to cater to the needs, personalities, and learning styles/abilities of various students in a classroom. Students also claimed to consequently be able to value the teaching styles of those in the course which were different from their own.

As the teacher of this course, I learned a lot about my students, was satisfied with the results, and was reminded of my own teaching preferences. I expect to repeat this activity in next year's course.

Acknowledgment

I am indebted to Dr. Raymond C. Moody, whose presentations at the University of Hawaii in 1998 were the stimulus for this project.

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About the Author

Jane Joritz-Nakagawa is an Associate Professor at Aichi University of Education where she teaches courses in English, English teaching methodology, cross-cultural communication and gender. Originally from the USA, Japan has been her home since 1989.

Appendix A

(Post-activity questionnaire)

About your group's lesson

1. Was making the lesson plan with your group difficult?
2. Did you have a difficult time deciding how to make your lesson?
3. How would you describe the teamwork in your group?
4. Did you have enough time to prepare the lesson?
5. What do you think are the strong points of your group's lesson?
6. What do you think are the weak points (if any) of your group's lesson?
7. If you were a student yourself, would you enjoy this lesson?
8. What value does your lesson have for the target student group?
9. Which MI does your lesson utilize?
10. Do you think it is important to consider MI when making a foreign language lesson? Why/why not?
11. Why did your group choose the material it did (of the 4 choices)?

About the other groups' lessons

12. Which activities that other groups came up with do you think are good ones?
13. Do you think it would be easier to prepare a lesson with others of the same/opposite psychological (personality) type?
14. Do you think it would be better to work with others of the same/opposite psychological (personality) type?
15. Write any additional comments/concerns as you wish.

Conference Announcements

ACPI TESOL, Costa Rica. July 7-9, 2004. . The Caribbean, Central America and South America Regional Group-Latin American TESOL Convention, "The Joy of Learning English in the Classroom," San Jose, Costa Rica. E-mail:elieth_ m@ amnet.co.cr. Http://mextesol.org.

American University TESOL. July 9-11, 2004. Summer intensive workshop, "Succeeding Across Educational Discourses: Supporting Nonnative-Speaking Students Entering American Colleges." Contact: Brock Brady, Director, AU Summer TESOL Institute. Tel. 202-885-2582. E-mail: tesol@american.edu. Http://american.edu/tesol/.

The International Association of World Englishes. July 16-18, 2004. "World Englishes in a Globalizing World," Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, USA. Proposal Contact: Dr. Tej K. Bhatia, Professor of Linguistics, 312 HBC, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1160 USA. Tel. 315-443-5374. Fax 315-443-5376. E-mail:tkbhatia@syr.edu.

Braz TESOL. July 19-22, 2004. 9th National Convention, "Expanding Horizons in ELT" at Minascentro - Belo Horizonte, M.G., Brazil. Contact: Vera Bradford, Tel and Fax: 55-11-3559-8782. E-mail braztesol @rex.net. Http://www.braz-tesol.org.br/.

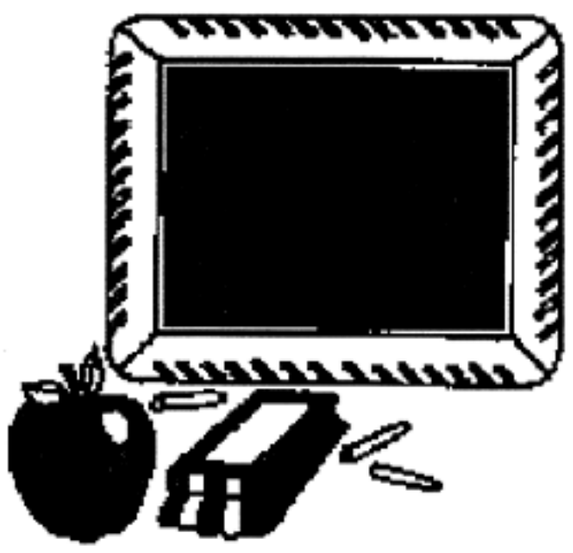
Pan Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics (PAAL)**.** August 20-22, 2004. The 9th PAAL Conference, Namseoul University, Seoul, Korea. Contact: Hikyoung Lee, Dept of English, Korea University, 1, 5-ga, Anamdong, Sungbuk-gu, Seoul 136-701, Korea. Tel./Fax 82-2-3290-1995. E-mail :paalkorea @yahoo.com. Http://www.paal.or.kr/.

The National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) and the Center for Second Language Research (CSLR). September 17-19, 2004. Conference, "Cultural Diversity and Language Education," Imin International Conference Center, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, Hawaii. Http://nflrc.hawaii. edu/prodev/ CDALE/.

The 4th Symposium on Second Language Writing. September 30-October 2, 2004. The 4th Symposium on Second Language Writing. "Second Language Writing Instruction in Context(s)," Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA. Contact: Paul Kei Matsuda. E-mail:symposium@jslw.org. Http://symposium.jslw.org/.

Korea TESOL. October 9-10, 2004. The 12th annual Korea TESOL International Conference, "Expanding Horizons: Techniques and Technology in ELT," at Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Korea. Contact: Phil Owen, Program Chair. E-mail:kotesol_conf@yahoo.com. Http://kotesol.org/conference.

MEXTESOL. October 14-17, 2004. 31st National Convention, Morelia, Mexico. Http://www.mextesolmorelia.org/.



Tips for Teachers

A Holiday Quiz.

Stella Yamazaki and Tatsuroh Yamazaki, Hosei University, Japan

In Japan, our intermediate EFL university students expect us to prepare something special related to the holidays and festivals celebrated by their foreign teachers. To please them, we have developed a template for a lesson that combines English study with cultural content. This template is flexible and may be adapted for other holidays, festivals, and celebrations appropriate to the culture and context in which other ESL or EFL teachers live and work.

The lesson consists of five stages: building interest, building background knowledge, linking vocabulary and content, completing a task, and closing. Each stage can be accomplished in a number of ways, and experienced teachers will have little difficulty thinking of ways to adapt the lesson for their circumstances. What follows is a description of a 90-minute lesson that we typically use at Christmas time.

Building Interest in the Holiday

Our students are familiar with the commercial aspects of Christmas. It is important to us that they understand that there is more to the holiday than buying lavish gifts. We begin our Christmas lesson by playing a video of "Feed the World," a rock song whose proceeds go toward hunger relief in Africa. It is a good example of the tradition of giving to the needy at Christmas and helps us introduce the notion of Christmas spirit.

Building Background Information

Then, we read a simple, but not childish, account of the Christmas story to give students some background knowledge about the significance of the holiday for Christians. Depending upon the level of our students, we might give a brief Japanese summary at the end of each page.

Linking Vocabulary and Content

Christmas is as much about fun as it is about religion, and the rest of the lesson reflects this. First, students match pictures of holiday symbols with English labels. In doing so, they learn that present-day Christmas customs and symbols come from several sources. For example, some practices and symbols that we associate with Christmas today actually come from ancient winter festivals that predate Christianity. These include use of the evergreen tree, mistletoe, wreath, and holly. Others relate to the Christmas story itself, such as angel, star, and caroling. Still others, such as chimney and reindeer, are more recent additions. Then, in pairs, students match sentence strips to pictures of Christmas activities, such as wrapping presents, baking cookies, and sending cards. We provide self-correction answer keys for both of these picture activities, so pairs can work at their own pace and check when they are ready. Other forms of realia besides pictures could be used for this stage in the lesson.

Completing a Task: The Christmas Quiz

This activity is a quiz in name only. In fact, it is a trivia guessing game that engages students in English and provides information about Christmas history and traditions. We used an encyclopedia as a source of information for building the quiz. Today, the Internet would provide ample information as well. Students work in groups of three to answer about 20 questions that are formatted to look like a multiple-choice quiz. They must agree on a group answer (or guess) for each question. Some questions are relatively easy and can be answered by using a dictionary. This means that every group can get some answers right. Other questions are quite difficult, forcing students to simply take a chance and guess. We announce that the group with the most right answers will win a prize. The promise of prizes and the familiar quiz format help engage everyone in the activity. Afterward, we "correct" the answers by calling randomly on groups to give their answers, but we provide corrections where necessary. In the end, everyone wins a prize, but the group with the most right answers wins two. More important, everyone has used English to complete a problem-solving task. The quiz is always the most popular part of the lesson. (Some sample quiz questions are listed below.)

Bringing the Lesson to a Close

We try to be prepared with two possibilities for closing the lesson. If there is still some time, we give pairs of students a set of discussion questions to ask and answer about their favorite holiday. These questions can be reused with other holiday lessons to help students review and recycle vocabulary and information. If time is running short, we may end class by singing a simple Christmas song, such as "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" or John Lennon's "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)"

Sample Questions from a Christmas Quiz

In groups, answer these questions about Christmas. Answer every question. Guess if necessary. The group with the most correct answers will win a prize.

1. What group of people first began the tradition of giving gifts in December?
   a. Christians b. Romans c. much older cultures
2. The word Christmas is sometimes written Xmas for short. X is the first letter of Christ's name in ___.
   a. Greek b. Italian c. Hebrew
3. When was Jesus born?
   a. on Dec. 25 b. during the winter c. We really don't know.
4. A display of the stable scene of Jesus' birth is sometimes called a ___.
   a. crèche b. manger c. piñata
5. Many present-day Christmas traditions came from ___.
   a. Germany b. Israel c. Ireland
6. Where were the first Christmas cards printed?
   a. in the U.S. b. in England c. in Germany
7. What two colors are often associated with Christmas?
   a. silver and gold b. red and green c. black and white
8. In a popular story, Santa Claus enters your house by coming through ___.
   a. the door b. a window c. the chimney
9. The name Santa Claus comes from which language?
   a. Dutch b. Italian c. Spanish
10. Which of these is not another name for Santa Claus?
    a. Kris Kringle b. St. Nicholas c. Santa Ana
11. Who helps Santa make toys for children?
    a. elves b. angels c. snowmen
12. The present-day image of Santa Claus comes mostly from ___.
    a. Charles Dickens' story "A Christmas Carol"
    b. Clement Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas"
    c. the popular song "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town"

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Teaching Business Email Writing

Chen Chan and Pang Jixian, Zhejiang University, People's Republic of China

Email is fast changing our way of communicating and interacting with people. The advantages are obvious. It is instantaneous, efficient, and easily disseminated. This is as true in the business world as it is in academia. In business communication, email is now widely used especially for internal communication and between business partners who have already established a working relationship with shared mutual benefits.

When compared with formal business letters, business email exhibits several distinctive features. One major distinguishing feature is that although business email depends on the written medium for its representation, it shows linguistic and stylistic features of spoken discourse. For example, it is often informal, straightforward, and context-bound. "Utterances" are often short and fragmentary. Informal abbreviations, non-specific references, repeated lexical and syntactical structures are also common.

Despite its increasingly important role in business communication, email is largely neglected in EFL writing courses. There is little mention of business email writing in textbooks. Instead, the business letter, a more formal but somewhat out-dated genre, is still the main focus of course materials on business writing. As a result, when some learners write business email, they refer to principles they have learned for business letter writing. The result is that their emails are essentially business letters transmitted by a new medium, though a little less formal and rigid.

On the other hand, some learners are probably aware of the conversational features of business email, and thus tend to view business email as what might be called "written telephone calls." Their email messages are often composed "on the fly" with little editing or proofreading. Some ignore style and grammar, making their writing impolite and unprofessional. All this can result in serious offenses in communication. As Guffey (2003) rightly points out, unlike forgettable telephone calls, email can create a permanent record and can even be used as evidences in trials.

Clearly, both groups of students need systematic instruction in the principles of writing business email. In order to discover what those principles are, we did some reading and conducted a small-scale study. Our reading showed us that although email is a relatively new and still evolving channel of communication, a number of rules for polite online interaction have emerged. Guffey (2003) states these rules in simple form as:

1. Limit any tendency to send blanket copies.
2. Never send spam.

3. Consider using identifying labels.
4. Use capital letters only for emphasis or for titles.
5. Announce attachments.
6. Don't forward messages without permission.

In our study, we analyzed a corpus of 55 authentic business emails, 22 by native English speakers and 33 by Chinese business professionals. We found there were noticeable differences in the messages composed by native as compared with non-native writers. As a result of this study, we developed a four-part unit of instruction for our students in the Department of International Trade at Zhejiang University. To date, student reaction has been positive. What follows is an outline of our unit.

Part 1: Raising Awareness

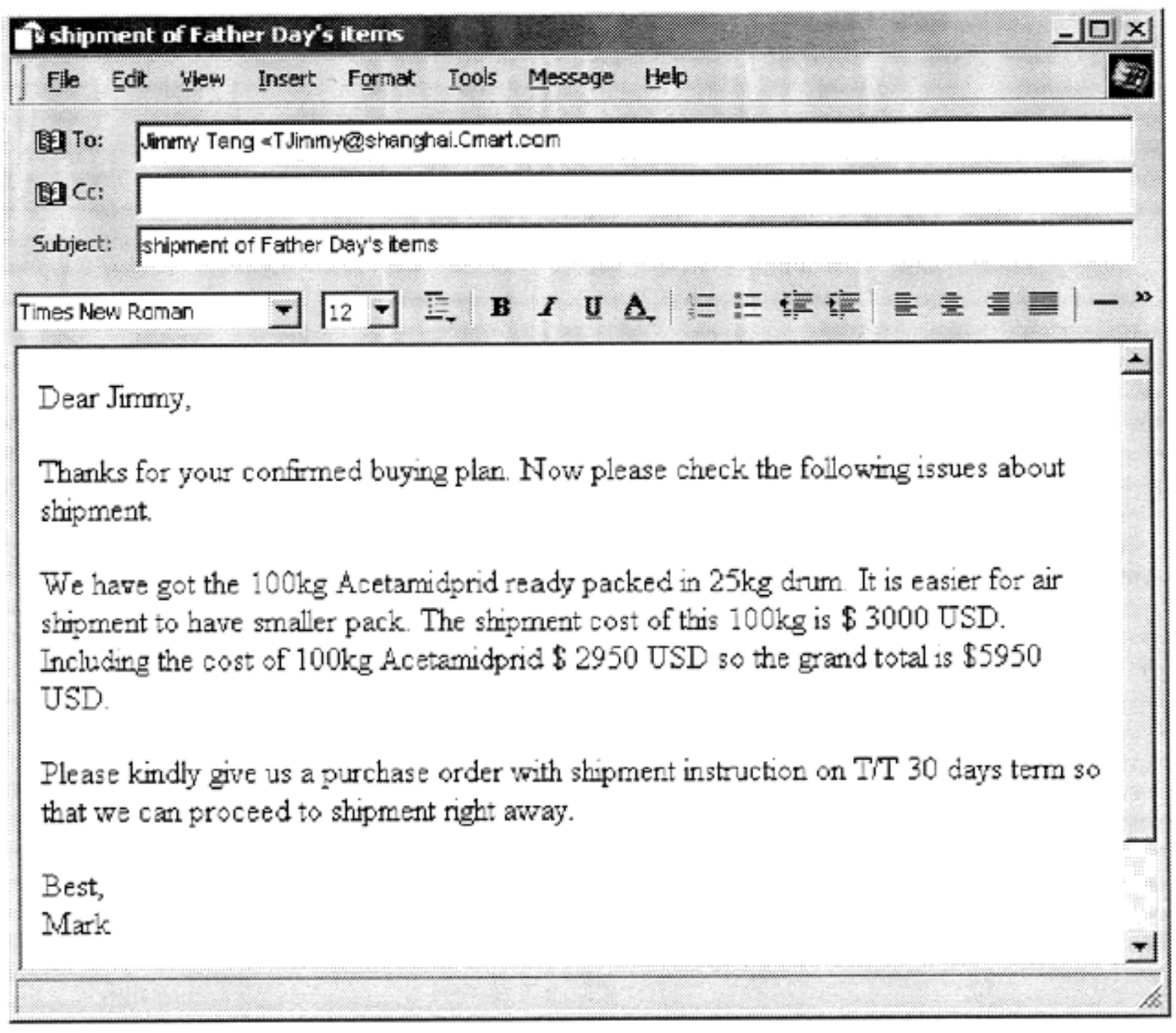
We begin our unit with an informal discussion using questions like the following.

1. Have you ever written an email? In what context?
2. From your experience, when would email be useful in the business world?
3. Have you ever known of an occasion where email has caused problems, or miscommunication? If yes, share your story with a partner.

Part Two: Readings

In this stage, we ask students to study both content and linguistic features of several email messages written by native speakers of English. An example of one message is below followed by discussion questions.

Sample Text



Questions for critical thinking and discussion:

1. Summarize the central idea of each email message.

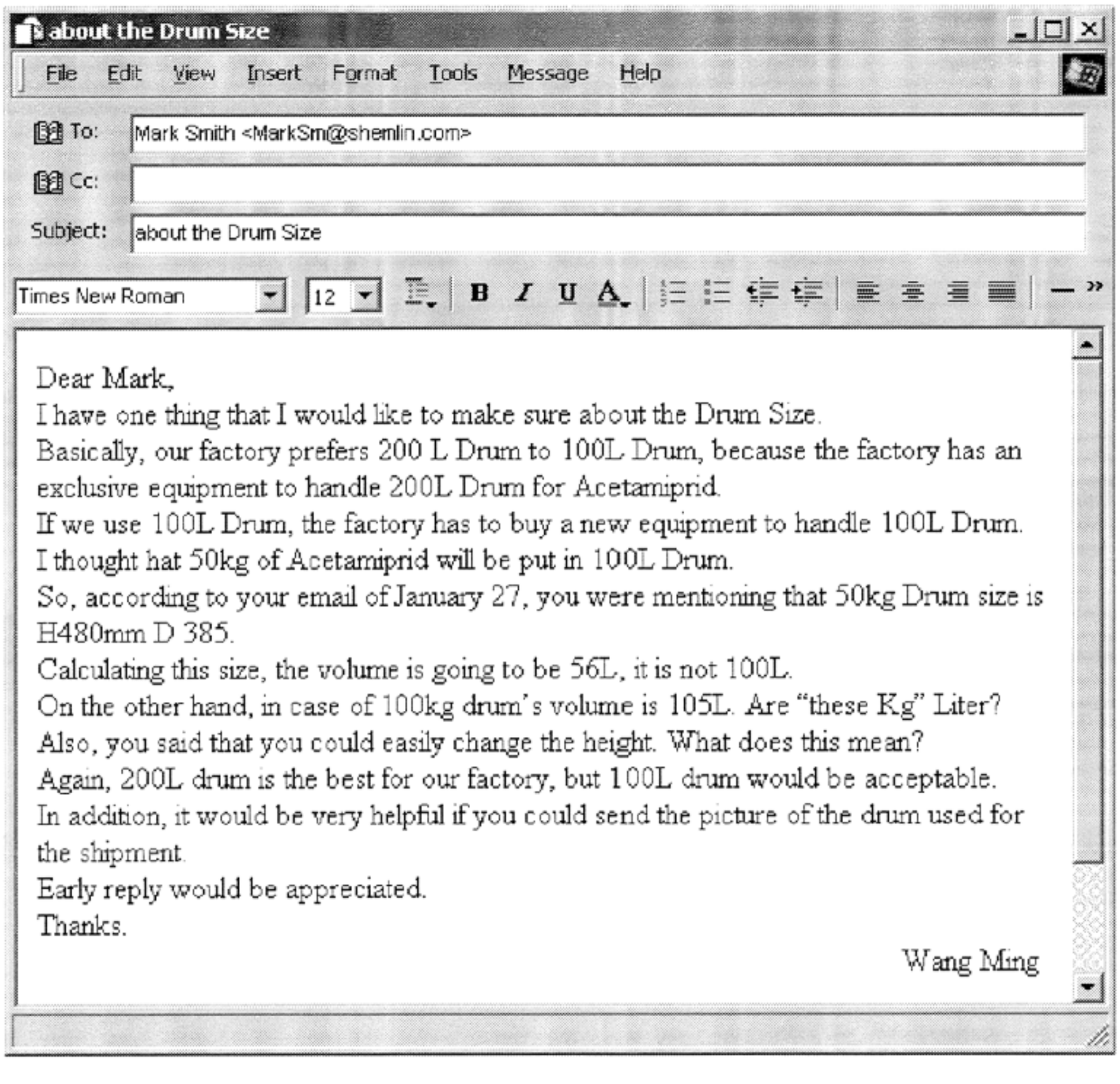
2. Do you think they are professional and effective emails? Give your reasons.

3. Discuss these linguistic features of the messages: styles of opening and closing, syntactic structures, elliptical forms, and use of contractions.

Part Three: Language Focus

Next, we have students examine a number of email messages written by Chinese business professionals like the one below.

Sample Text


about the Drum Size

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Message Help

To: Mark Smith <MarkSm@shemlin.com>

Cc:

Subject: about the Drum Size

Times New Roman 12

Dear Mark,
I have one thing that I would like to make sure about the Drum Size.
Basically, our factory prefers 200 L Drum to 100L Drum, because the factory has an exclusive equipment to handle 200L Drum for Acetamiprid.
If we use 100L Drum, the factory has to buy a new equipment to handle 100L Drum.
I thought hat 50kg of Acetamiprid will be put in 100L Drum.
So, according to your email of January 27, you were mentioning that 50kg Drum size is H480mm D 385.
Calculating this size, the volume is going to be 56L, it is not 100L.
On the other hand, in case of 100kg drum's volume is 105L. Are "these Kg" Liter?
Also, you said that you could easily change the height. What does this mean?
Again, 200L drum is the best for our factory, but 100L drum would be acceptable.
In addition, it would be very helpful if you could send the picture of the drum used for the shipment.
Early reply would be appreciated.
Thanks.

Wang Ming

Directions for Students:

1. Compare these texts with those that you read in Part Two. Look again at styles of opening and closing, syntactic structures, elliptical forms, and use of contractions.

2. What problems do you see? Revise or rewrite these messages.

To help answer question 2, we discuss some differences in style, syntax, and degree of conciseness in the email messages of native as compared with non-native speakers of English. These differences surfaced in our study.

Style of Opening and Closing

Native speakers usually start with the recipient's given name, or even without any salutation, and then go directly to the topic. Chinese learners, in contrast, tend to address the recipients with a salutation beginning with "Dear …," followed by some phatic expressions. Closings also show differences. Native speakers are inclined to finish an email simply, with only, or even no, sender's name, while Chinese writers are more likely to follow the letter closing patterns of formal written correspondence.

Syntactic Structures

Email written by native speakers is like natural speech, which is delivered clause by clause. These clauses are frequently connected with coordinate conjunctions like and and so. In contrast, email written by Chinese professionals displays more elaborate and roundabout expressions with complex syntactic structures. Some conjunctive expressions like otherwise, on the other hand, and generally speaking are frequently used.

Conciseness

Native speakers usually adopt direct communication strategies. Politeness is mainly achieved by imperative sentences mitigated by words like please or thanks. Their email messages contain only what is necessary to convey information and be courteous. However, in our corpus of messages written by Chinese professionals, different forms are more popularly used to minimize possible imposition. In making a request, for example, some wordy structures like *It would be very helpful if…* appear often.

Thus, email written by Chinese professionals is more like formal business letters than email written by native speakers. Email by native speakers was not without problems, however. For example, we found multiple topics were quite common in one message in our corpus. This is considered improper and unprofessional according to Guffey (2003). Without proper models and instruction, examples like this one may mislead EFL learners.

Part Four: Writing Tasks

In this stage, students compose several of their own business email messages.

Sample Task

FIRSTLITE is a lighting manufacturing company in China. Its main products include Down/Spot/Halogen lights that enjoy a good reputation for their extraordinary reliability. Suppose you are an assistant to Louis Zhang who is the sales manager in charge of the

European market. Louis wants you to write an email message to one of your old customers who wants to place an order for table lights. Detailed information about the product is available at the company's new website http://www.ramie.com.cn/jxzm /jxzmE.htm.

In your message, include a brief introduction to the new product, the price, and possible discount. Tell your customer about the company's website, too.

Conclusion

Although email is a new and still developing channel of communication, students in international business courses benefit from systematic instruction that builds awareness of its characteristics and gives them an opportunity to practice writing their own messages. Our unit has proven useful for our students, and we hope that this outline may be of value to other ESL and EFL business English instructors.

Reference

Guffey, M. E. (2003). *Essentials of Business Communication,* 6th ed. Mason, OH: South-Western College Press.

About the Authors

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Recitation Recitation

Ding Jiali, Jiangnan University, People's Republic of China

There is an old Chinese saying that goes like this: One can make himself a poet by reciting fluently 300 poems of the Tang Dynasty. The Tang was a prosperous era with a rich tradition of poetry. Recitation of poetry and all manner of other texts was once a common teaching technique in China. Students were asked to recite passages whether they understood them or not. Later, people criticized recitation as boring and ineffective. Students are now taught to think and solve academic problems scientifically and analytically.

In foreign language classes, memorization and recitation have also been discarded in favor of more communicative techniques. However, students, particularly at the beginning level, frequently express frustration at not being able to recall English words or to say anything in a natural, fluent way. By transforming the traditional form of recitation into something fresh, I have been able to help my students overcome some of these initial feelings of frustration.

The three techniques described below have enabled me to use recitation to help my students develop confidence and fluency in their use of English.

Encourage students to recite with tapes.

In the beginning, I encourage my students to listen to and imitate tape recordings. Special English broadcasts from Voice of America are particularly useful. Some students prefer to imitate the voice of BBC broadcasts. My experience is that students enjoy listening to and imitating both accents. Developing familiarity with different accents also facilitates communicating with English speakers from different parts of the world. It is not long before students are ready to try imitating live broadcasts. Other suitable sources of recordings are books on tape and collections of famous speeches. These kinds of recordings have the advantage of being authentic material with appealing content, making them far more attractive models for imitation than the typical language textbook recordings.

Encourage students to choose their own materials.

After the initial stage, students are ready to choose material that matches their individual interests, background, or goals. My students have selected material as varied as poetry, film scripts, short stories, and even Francis Bacon essays. They can also be encouraged to work together to recite lines of actors in a favorite movie or

characters from a book that they have read. Of course, the possibilities for imitation and recitation with music are endless.

Encourage students to recite in front of their peers.

Just as the publishing stage is important in the writing process, going public is also important in oral fluency. Knowing that they will recite in front of their peers gives students the incentive to attend to pronunciation, intonation, body language, and stage manner. A presentation may be for the class, school, or wider public. Public speaking competitions have a long tradition in many parts of the world. This format can be adapted for a foreign language speech event. Whether it becomes a competition, a performance, and simply a special event in class might depend on the goals and setting of the school. My experience is that students enjoy the opportunity to display their growing fluency and that such an event helps create a target language speaking community where it might be difficult to find one otherwise.

After using recitation for a while now, I have made some informal observations about its benefits. Recitation of authentic material helps my students internalize many of the features of spoken English. They achieve a level of automaticity that is often lacking at the beginning level. This gives them a sense of autonomy and empowerment. They practice more freely and engage more naturally in the use of the target language. Vocabulary grows and the carry over is apparent even in their writing.

About the Author

Ms. Ding Jiali teaches English in the Foreign Languages Department of Jiangnan University, Wuxi, the People's Republic of China. She was a visiting scholar in Australia in 2000.

Criterion-referenced Language Testing

Review by Hyeong-Jong Lee
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

CRITERION-REFERENCED LANGUAGE TESTING. James Dean Brown and Thom Hudson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2002), xvi + 320 pp. $29.95 (pbk), ISBN 0521000831.

Criterion-referenced Language Testing, authored by James Dean and Thom Hudson, focuses on how criterion-referenced testing (CRT) can provide realistic and useful test development tools to assist language teachers and language curriculum developers. This book addresses the wide variety of CRT and decision-making needs that language-teaching professionals must consider in actual testing situations. Each of the seven chapters of this volume contains a discussion of the theoretical and practical parameters involved in language testing situations.

The underlying logic of CRT is based on assessing how much of the content in a course or program is being learned by the students. Such assessment depends on comparing performance to well-defined criteria rather than assessing students' performance in relationship to the performance of other students in a norm group. The authors of *Criterion-reference Language Testing* take a focused approach to the issues involved in developing, implementing, and improving language tests with relation to the criterion-referenced approach. In so doing, they explore what kinds of alternate paradigms are possible in language testing situations, what curriculum-related language testing is, how CRT items should be constructed, how basic descriptive and item statistics for CRT can be conducted and interpreted, how reliability, dependability, and unidimensionality in CRT should be addressed, how the validity of CRT can be viewed, how CRT can be administered, how criterion-referenced feedback should be given, and how the results of CRT can be reported.

Providing a readable introduction to the issues surrounding CRT, this book guides readers in constructing systematic curriculum-related testing using the criterion-referenced approach to analyze language testing data. Symbols and equations in *Criterion-referenced Language Testing* are both graphically and verbally explained, and detailed examples and illustrations are presented throughout the volume. With its clear examples, *Criterion-referenced Language Testing* not only provides an applied introduction to any language testing course, but is also a valuable

reference for graduate students and language testing professionals who are preparing to develop new perspectives, maintain language programs, or conduct research in the field of language testing.

About the Reviewer

Hyeong-Jong Lee is a Ph.D student with the specialization of Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Background and research interests include quantitative research methodology in studies of second-language acquisition, language testing, and the teaching of English to the speakers of other languages.

Conference Announcements

Puerto TESOL. November 18-19, 2004. "Merging All Our Voices as One: Imagine the Possibilities," Caribe Hilton Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Contact: Prof. William Garcia-Cardona, PRTESOL 31st Convetion, PO Box 366828, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 00936-6828. Tel. daytime 787-764-000 ext. 2702, 787-617-9125. Fax 787-774-9125. Email:wg_prtesol@hotmail.com Http://www.puertoricotesol.org/.

CLASIC 2004. December 1-3, 2004. The Inaugural CLS Conference. "Current Perspectives and Future Directions in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning," Centre for Language Studies , National University of Singapore, 9 Arts Link Singapore 117570. Tel. 65-687746715. Fax 65-67777736. E-mail:clasic@nus.edu.sg. Http:// fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/clasic2004.

International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) and the Japan Association for Language Education and Technology. August 5-10, 2005. Brigham Young University, Provo, UT USA. Contact: Harold H. Hendricks, Supervisor, Humanities Technology and Research Support Center, 3060 JKHB Box 26098, Brigham Young University Provo, UT 84602-6098 USA. Tel. 801-422-6448. E-mail:harold_ hendricks@byuh.edu. Http://ce.byu.edu/cw/fleat5/.

TESOL Italy. October 22-23, 2004. Conference, "Reflective Teaching," Grant Hotel, Parco Del Principi, Rome, Italy. Contact Patrizia Petruccetti, c/o TESOL Italy Office, Via Boncompagni, 2, 00187 - Rome ITALY. Tel. 0039-06-46742432. E-mail:tesol @usis.it.

Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing

Review by J. Perry Christensen
Brigham Young University Hawaii, USA

TREATMENT OF ERROR IN SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENT WRITING. Dana R. Ferris. The University of Michigan Press, 2002, Pp. 152, ($16.00)

Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing is part of the Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers, edited by Diane Belcher and Jun Liu. The text is designed to be used in a language methods class or as supplemental reading for the seasoned writing teacher. It specifically concentrates on how to mark errors in order to provide L2 students with feedback on their written work. The book contains 152 pages, divided into 5 chapters with appendixes. In addition, after major sections and chapters, summaries provide useful synopses making it easy for the reader to review the key points.

The first two chapters are a review of the literature. Ferris describes studies which show how marking errors has no measurable effect on improving L2 student writing. Then she systematically refutes these studies by offering other studies which show that if error correction is used properly, student writing will improve. In these chapters, Ferris also defines terms. For example, she gives definitions for the terms "treatable" and "untreatable" errors. Treatable errors are linguistic components, such as verb tenses, which follow prescribed rules that can be taught. On the other hand, errors dealing with prepositions or articles, which do not have clearly defined rules and require more of a feel for the language, are classified as untreatable errors. Ferris puts these definitions to use in later chapters when she explains why a teacher would want to identify error types and how a teacher may want to approach each error type.

Chapter Three explains how the L2 writing teacher can prepare to treat student errors, which can be a daunting task. Ferris writes that sometimes a teacher may recognize that an error has been made, but not know why it is an error or be able to give a simple explanation because it is a complex grammatical mistake. By working with an experienced teacher and studying second language acquisition theory as well as grammar, Ferris says a teacher can be in a better position to make sound judgments in responding to L2 student writing errors.

The focus of Chapter Four is responding to student errors. Ferris talks about what kinds of errors should be marked and what kind of feedback may be appropriate once errors in a paper are identified. For example, Ferris proposes that direct feedback, or teacher correction of the error, be used for untreatable errors and for lower level language students who have not learned the grammar rules governing the error. For upper level students, Ferris advises using indirect feedback for treatable errors. Indirect feedback consists of marking essays by underlining errors, putting check marks in the margin next to lines containing errors, or using coded symbols above errors which suggest what kind of error was made. By using indirect feedback, the student is aware that there is an error and then has to exert some mental effort to fix it, thus investing in and gaining more from the learning experience. Ferris concludes the chapter by offering five wonderful suggestions for conserving energy and avoiding burnout. These suggestions alone put the book into the "must read" category.

In Chapter Five, Ferris examines the next step beyond marking errors. She discusses how making errors may be a sign of progression in acquiring a second language. Then Ferris proposes ways to overcome these errors. One of these ways includes developing mini lessons which address the errors the students are making. Another is helping students to self-edit by focusing on specific aspects of their writing. Ferris also offers suggestions for making peer editing more effective. This can be done through appropriate training and structured activities which are closely supervised by the teacher.

The appendixes provide additional information which adds to the book. Some of the items are examples of assignments for a teacher preparation course, error type definitions, error analysis sheets, and samples of student papers which have been marked.

Overall, the book is well-written and informative. By reading the book, one not only learns theory, but also many useful applications to incorporate into the classroom. Prospective teachers as well as experienced professionals will benefit from reading it.

About the Reviewer

J. Perry Christensen is currently the Writing Coordinator for the English as an International Language Program at Brigham Young University Hawaii.

Interaction and Language Learning: Case Studies in TESOL Practice Series

Review by Paul Kinsella
University of British Columbia, Canada

INTERACTION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: CASE STUDIES IN TESOL PRACTICE SERIES. Jill Burton and Charles Clennell, Eds. Alexandria, VA: TESOL, 2003, 200 pp., ISBN 1-931185-050-0. $29.95 (member $24.95)

Let's be clear about one thing right away: This is not the book you reach for when you are in urgent need of an emergency lesson plan twenty minutes before class time. Although generated by teaching practice and ripe with interesting implications for the classroom, for the most part the case studies in this volume require the careful and unhurried attention of a thoughtful reader. They are best absorbed at a slight distance from the ebb and flow of classroom experience, perhaps in a weekend of reflection on its dynamics, or as part of a longer program of pedagogical study.

The premise uniting the various cases in this book, each of them represented by a separate chapter, is the crucial importance of interaction in the process of language learning. The term "interaction" would by itself be rather vague and open-ended, but the editors have taken steps to bring it into focus in a variety of ways, which they set out for the reader in an introductory chapter. They then divide the book into three sections: the first, comprising Chapters 2-6, contains case studies based directly on classroom practice, reporting on such topics as "The Contribution of a Course Assistant to English for Academic Purposes Speaking Classes" (Chapter 2), or "Teaching Spoken Language Skills through a Reading Comprehension Text" (Chapter 5). The next section, Chapters 7-9, revolves mainly around implications arising from the increasing prominence of English as an international language (EIL), and finally, Chapters 10-12 present inquiries into how to use native-speaker (NS) and learner interaction in the classroom as a means of learning. These broad divisions in the book also interpenetrate each other in numerous ways connected to the theme of interaction, through the recurrence of issues such as "intelligibility and comprehensibility," "communication management strategies," "interactional modifications and adjustments," and so on.

As the phrases above may indicate to the attentive reader, the common concern which lies at the heart of this book, and which for me lends its greatest interest in spite

of the occasionally dry effect of the language, is the process of communication itself, not only in its successful transactions, but also in its moments of confusion, in its potential breakdowns and temporary (or even out-and-out) derailments, as learners, teachers, visitors, and others, strive to make sense to each other. Almost every chapter in the book contains segments of authentic language (recorded and transcribed) which are then used as the raw data for often fascinating analyses of the shifts, strategies, and groping towards meaning of humans trying to communicate across language barriers. Thus in Chapter 6, for example, we are treated to an investigation of the "collaboration, accommodation and co-construction" used by two relatively fluent EFL teachers to comprehend each other's explanation of the subdivisions of TESOL itself (ESL and EFL); in Chapter 11 we analyze what happens when relatively low-level students set out to explain a technical process to a native-speaking outsider; and in Chapter 12 we see how students can become more conscious of their own communication strategies through learning to transcribe and analyze portions of their own discourse.

Explicit in the final chapter, and implicit in several others, is the suggestion that TESOL practitioners could be making more use of recording/transcription/analysis methods in their activities. This is a proposal which individual students, teachers, and researchers must weigh for themselves according to their own pedagogical preferences and instincts. Some will perhaps be more keen than others on the chores involved in recording and transcription, and a few may find themselves a little put off by the stuttering, influent appearance of authentic discourse on the page. Those who feel genuinely interested in this area, however, will likely place a high value on the set of case studies in this volume, as models of intriguing analysis presented at a high professional standard.

About the Reviewer

Paul Kinsella has a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of British Columbia (UBC). He teaches academic speaking and listening at the English Language Institute, UBC, and writing for graduate students at the UBC Writing Centre.

Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a semiannual publication of the Department of English Language Teaching and Learning of Brigham Young University Hawaii, and is dedicated to the dissemination of ideas and issues of interest to teachers of English to speakers of other languages worldwide.

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