

## TESL Seminar Presentations Cover Wide Variety of Topics

How well do learners of English as a second language understand the myriad of "non-verbal oral signals" (such as "hmmm," "uh-uh," or "ah-hah!") so commonly used by speakers of English but so infrequently taught in ESL classes? Can a test which purposely blurs parts of a text be taken seriously? What are the implications of "foreigner talk" for the ESL teacher?

These and a number of other interesting questions have been investigated by seniors graduating in TESL at Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus in the last year. Students earning their B.A. degree in teaching English as a second language at BYU-HC are required to plan, conduct, and report on their research on a topic that is both interesting to them and relevant to the concerns of teachers of ESL. As the following list of titles indicates, they have covered a wide variety of topics, but all meet these criteria of interest and relevance:

"The Inductive Approach vs. The Deductive Approach to Teaching ESL Students the Order of Noun Modifiers in English," by Johnny Ka Wing Mok.

"The Criterion Validity of Carleton's 'Blur Test'," by Mere Meha.

"Test Format and Debilitative Anxiety," by Annette P. Lukachovsky.

"Literature: Its Values in Tonga's ESL Classrooms," by Hisipaniola L. Makalo.

"Dictation as an English Language Proficiency Test," by Yoshihisa Ohyatsu.

"Motivating ESL Students in English Reading," by Silipa Lutui.

"The Difficulties of Teaching English as a Second Language in Hong Kong," by Diana Yat Man Tang.

"A Comparison of the Acceptable-word and Exact-word Methods for Scoring a Cloze Test," by Connie Shek Kan Kojima.

"Non-verbal Oral Language: A Difficulty Faced by the English as a Second Language Student," by Teri Lee Lehman.

"Foreigner Talk: Implications for the ESL Teacher," by Debbie Li.

Short explanations of a few of these research projects follow:

Teri Lee Lehman's paper discussed her findings from research conducted at BYU-HC regarding ESL students' comprehension of non-verbal oral language signals. She found that, in contrast to native speakers of English, ESL learners generally failed to comprehend the various non-verbal oral signals commonly used for communicating in English. Furthermore, length of stay in the United States had little influence on their amount of comprehension. Given the importance of non-verbal communication (experts claim that 65% of communication is non-verbal) and the fact that it is quite culture-specific, the case for teaching these oral signals in the classroom seems strong.

A promising new test format, devised by Philip Carleton, was investigated by Mere

Meha in her senior seminar research. In the test, a passage is purposely blurred (in varying degrees) by inserting several sheets of paper between the first page and a carbon copy while typing it. To comprehend (and re-write) the blurred passage, examinees must rely on their knowledge of English structure and vocabulary, and thus it becomes a test of their proficiency. The blur test offers several advantages. It is efficient, easy to construct, and relevant to the real world (who hasn't ever struggled to read a blurred copy?). Unfortunately, in comparing blur test results against those obtained with a cloze passage, a dictation, and the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, the blurred passage used in this investigation failed to demonstrate validity as a testing device. Before ruling the blur test out, however, further research using different formats is needed.

Foreigner talk, the subject addressed in Debbie Li's research, is a simplified register commonly used by native speakers when they address foreigners. It is characterized by phonological, lexical, syntactic, non-verbal, and discourse modifications. While it is a common belief that modified input eases communication, whether or not it is helpful for second language acquisition is unclear.

The unique status of English in Hong Kong was investigated by Diana Yat Man Tang. In this former British colony, English is neither a second nor a foreign language. While it is an official language and a medium of instruction in the school system, it is not used as a *lingua franca* among the Chinese themselves. Therefore,

special difficulties arise when English is taught in Hong Kong schools. Tang's report explains the status of English in Hong Kong, including its functions in various sectors. It also discusses the major difficulties—linguistic, psychological, and environmental—faced by English language teachers in Hong Kong.

Problems with the different systems used for scoring cloze tests formed the rationale for Connie Shek Kan Kojima's senior seminar research. Kojima's research, which was carried out at BYU-HC, compared the acceptable-word and exact-word scoring methods in terms of their validity, reliability, and practicality. Consistent with the results of other research along the same lines, she found that both the acceptable-word and exact-word methods yield similar results as far as validity and reliability are concerned. The only apparent difference is the additional effort and time required when using the acceptable-word method.

Further information on these papers, as well as any of the other topics researched by TESL seniors at BYU-HC, can be obtained by writing to...

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