

TESOL Reporter

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TESL Reporter

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

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The Effects of Lexical Input in Second Language Writing: A Corpus-Informed Approach

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Introduction

A lack of vocabulary knowledge has been considered the main difficulty for writing in a second language (see Leki & Carson, 1994). To enhance writing performance, a corpus approach has been regarded as a viable alternative for helping learners with their lexico-grammatical patterns (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Flowerdew, 2010) and organizational patterns (Tribble, 2001). Tribble and Jones (1997) discussed two possibilities of incorporating corpora into L2 writing classrooms. First, teachers could examine a corpus to determine the most common words or patterns relative to a target genre, and write teaching materials based on the observed results. Second, students can be taught how to use a concordancer to explore the corpus themselves. This study was designed to investigate in what ways a corpus-informed approach has an impact on L2 writing and how L2 learners perceive the effects of corpus-informed materials on their English writing.

Literature Review

For more than two decades, the application of corpora has been regularly described as one of the most promising ideas in language teaching (see Johns, 1986; Sinclair & Carter, 2004) and a number of attempts have been made to apply corpora to L2 writing instruction. Thurstun and Candlin (1997), by utilizing a specialized corpus, designed a workbook for students' essay writing. The workbook provides both native and non-native English speaking university students with intensive exposure to some of the most important words in academic English. The workbook also introduces various rhetorical functions of academic essays—

such as stating the topic, referring to the literature, and drawing conclusions—and presents sets of concordance-based exercises on the most common vocabulary items used for carrying out these functions. The selection of vocabulary items is based on a specialized corpus of professional academic writing, an electronic collection of academic texts and papers from a range of disciplines, with a total word count of over one million words.

Grounded in discourse and genre analytic frameworks, Tribble (2002) outlined the ways in which appropriate corpus resources can be used to help learners develop competence as writers within specific academic domains. He demonstrated the use of keywords and frequency lists to identify lexico-grammatical features of the text in specific genres, and concluded that it is a plausible strategy for helping learners to understand text features in EAP and ESP writing.

Two more publications on applying corpus linguistics to the development of teaching material are that of Coxhead (2000) and Coxhead and Byrd (2007). Using a corpus linguistics approach, Coxhead (2000) generated an academic wordlist (AWL) of 570 headwords and 3000 words altogether. The idea of the AWL is to provide a shortcut for learners to expand their vocabulary by learning the most frequently-used lexis for academic writing. Coxhead and Byrd (2007) delineate a possible way, through integrating concordances with the keyword list, to prepare teachers to teach vocabulary and grammar for academic prose. In comparison to the traditional method of selecting and analyzing samples of academic prose, the authors argued that the web-based corpus approach, concordancing in particular, was more innovative and effective for helping teachers with materials development and providing them with information about academic language. They further stated that using such learning materials can benefit students to obtain the skill and knowledge needed to become effective learners of new words and their associated grammar.

Although Hyland (2003) states that the use of a corpus and a concordancer can offer “one of the most exciting applications of new technologies to L2 writing classes” (p. 167), two existing problems of corpus use in this area, in theory and in methodology, cannot be ignored. From a methodological point of view, Braun (2007) points out that most accessible corpora so far have been developed with linguistic research goals only, and they are not necessarily the resources with the most obvious pedagogical value. She stresses the values of a smaller and

genre-specific corpus, arguing that it can overcome some of the shortcomings of “mainstream” corpora, especially with regard to size and diversity of content. But realistically, these small corpora have not travelled well beyond the institutions in which they were created (Aston, 2004). From a theoretical point of view, Widdowson (2002) has criticized the use of corpora stating that while language learning is concerned with discourse and the use of language in concrete communicative situations, corpora are only a collection of texts, that is, products of language use isolated from any communicative situation.

When integrating corpora into language teaching, it seems to be more pertinent to adopt a corpus-informed rather than a corpus-based approach on the grounds that, in the former, learning takes on the advantages of the traditional teacher-student interactivity as well as the technological benefits brought by the pedagogical application of a corpus. The significance of a corpus-informed approach to language teaching is also reinforced by McCarthy (2008). He compares the difference between corpus-based and corpus-informed approaches: i.e., the corpus-based materials tend to be absolutely based on what we get from the corpus about language use, no matter whether they are useful or not. On the other hand, in a corpus-informed approach, teachers or material writers attempt to utilize corpus information in accordance with students’ needs in order to filter it for pedagogical purposes.

The works cited above suggest the feasibility of developing writing materials using a corpus approach and the usefulness of corpus materials in helping students to acquire linguistic knowledge and improve the quality of their writing. However, this claim is mainly based on the writers’ observations, not on empirical research. To this writer’s knowledge, no research appears to have focused on the effects of corpus-informed materials on L2 writing by comparing the writing outcomes of a control and the experimental group. Hence, the need exists for empirical research to investigate whether corpus-informed materials help students improve their writing.

Research Questions

Two research questions are addressed in this study:

1. Can corpus-informed materials help L2 learners improve their overall writing quality?
2. Do L2 learners believe that corpus-informed materials help their writing?

Methodology

Corpus-informed Materials

First, a topic-specific corpus was compiled consisting of texts related to the topics of gambling and lottery. The texts were obtained from two sources: online authoritative English news websites and a small corpus named LOCNESS (Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays).

Following an innovative text-collecting approach suggested by Nelson (2009), three authoritative English news websites which contained quality articles on the desired topics were identified. They were BBC News, the Guardian and the New York Times. Once the websites were identified, a search for the keywords gambling and lottery on the websites was carried out and the relevant articles were downloaded.

The other source was from a sub-corpus of opinion essays on the topic of a national lottery written by British students and retrieved from LOCNESS. In this corpus, each text had approximately 500-600 words. Twelve essays, identified as samples of good writing by an experienced native English speaking teacher of writing, who was also an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) writing examiner, were selected for this study. Although it could be argued that essays written by native English speaking students may not be a suitable and reliable source for teaching English writing, it should also be noted that these revised texts can be deemed appropriate as they deal with the same subject field of the writing task. They are, in fact, quite close to the students' writing compared with the longer academic texts.

Next, a keyword list was generated from the topic-based corpus with the aid of a corpus tool called Wmatrix (Rayson, 2002). Target words were selected on the basis of two criteria: frequency of occurrence in the small, topic-based corpus (each word occurs at least three times), and abstract nouns often used in opinion essays (Read, 2004). According to the criteria, five words were chosen. They were controversy, criticism, objection, situation and effect. About ten concordance lines of each target word were selected and presented in the corpus-informed materials (see the appendix).

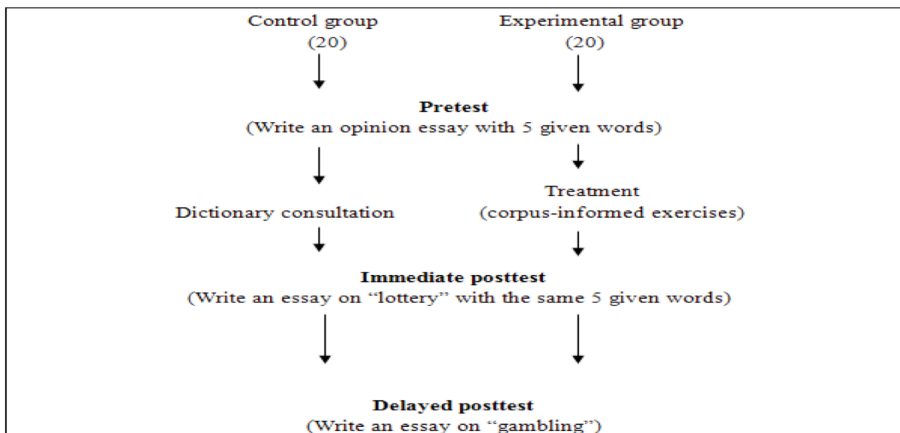
Participants

Forty third-year university students majoring in English for Business Purposes at a University in south China participated in this study. Their overall English proficiency level was upper intermediate according to the Oxford English Placement Test. The participants were randomly assigned to a control group and an experimental group, each group consisting of twenty students. A writing pretest conducted before the experiment showed there was no statistically significant difference in English writing competence between the two groups.

Procedure

The two groups were instructed to perform three writing exercises, i.e., a pretest, an immediate posttest, and a delayed posttest (see Figure 1). Each writing test lasted 60 minutes. In the first week (Week 1), a pretest was taken by both groups. In the following week (Week 2), both groups took an immediate posttest, writing an opinion essay on the topic of lottery. Before the students took the immediate posttest, the experimental group was given a set of concordance exercises to learn the target words while the control group was only allowed to consult their dictionaries in order to learn the words. Two weeks later (Week 4), both groups took a delayed posttest, writing an opinion essay on gambling. Following the delayed posttest, questionnaires on the learners' evaluation of the corpus-informed concordance exercises were administered to the experimental group.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the Experiment



Data Analysis

Two sets of data were analyzed to investigate the effects of corpus-informed materials on learners' writing products: (1) student essays and (2) descriptive data obtained from students' questionnaire responses and students' learning journal entries. Three native English speaking teachers were invited to evaluate students' writing products. They had taught writing for more than five years and were also experienced IELTS examiners for the British Council. They marked the student essays according to the TWE (TOEFL Test of Written English Guide). The TWE test is holistically scored using a criterion-referenced scale ranging from 1 to 6. A score of 1 demonstrates incompetence in writing while a score of 6 shows clear competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels. Each essay was scored twice, each time by a different rater. When the scoring differed by more than one point (e.g., one score of 3 and one of 5), the essays were sent to a third rater to resolve the discrepancy. A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed in order to maintain inter-rater reliability between the two sets of ratings ($r=.823$).

In addition to the holistic scores, the student essays were also textually analyzed to determine the extent to which the abstract nouns (controversy, criticism, objection, situation and effect) had been accurately used in the pretest, the immediate posttest, and the delayed posttest.

Finally, students were surveyed for their views on the corpus-informed approach in L2 writing. The responses to the Likert-scaled questionnaires in each category were summed and treated as interval data. The mean and standard deviation were calculated using SPSS, and its internal reliability was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. In order to enhance the presentation of the questionnaire data, students' responses were coded into three categories—"helpful," "not helpful," and "no opinion"—by placing all positive answers (5 "somewhat agree", 6 "agree" and 7 "strongly agree") into the "helpful" category, and all negative answers (1 "strongly disagree", 2 "disagree", 3 "Somewhat disagree") into the "not helpful" category.

Results

Holistic Scores

As can be seen in Figure 2, the mean scores of the control group and the experimental group in the pretest were very close to each other, which were 3.8

Figure 2. Mean scores of the three writing tests

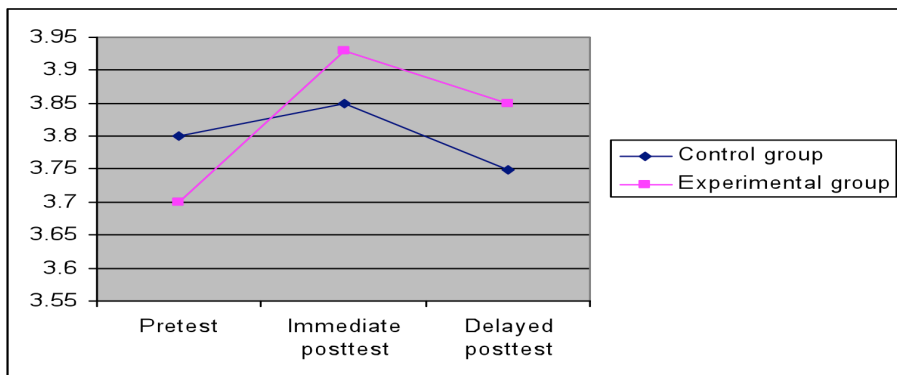


Table 1. Appropriacy Scale

Scale	Category	Description
1	Appropriate	Acceptable to use the target phrase in the context
2	Less appropriate	Grammatically acceptable, but seldom used in argumentative context
3	Inappropriate	Grammatically or semantically incorrect; definitely not used in the context

and 3.7 respectively. In the immediate posttest, the average score of the control group increased to 3.85 with a mean improvement of 0.05 while the experimental group's score rose to 3.95 with a better mean improvement of 0.23. In the delayed posttest, though, the two groups' mean scores dropped slightly in comparison with the immediate posttest, but the mean of the experimental group remained higher than that of the control group.

Accurate Use of Abstract Nouns

Error-free ratios between groups and the improved use of the abstract nouns within the experimental group were compared. Two of the holistic scorers evaluated the students' use of the target nouns by categorizing them on a 3-point scale: appropriate, less appropriate, and inappropriate (see Table 1). If the use of a noun fell into the category of "less appropriate" or "inappropriate", it was characterized as an error. Figure 3 shows the error-free ratios between the control

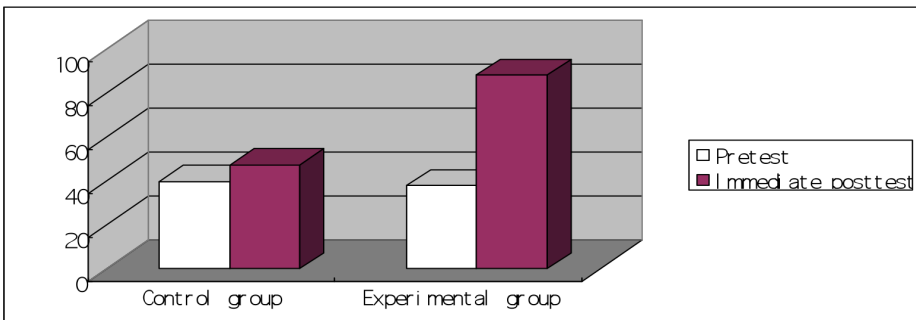
group and the experimental group in the pretest and the immediate posttest. In the pretest, the control group and the experimental group had similar error-free ratios in terms of the use of the five target nouns (39.9% and 37.9% respectively). However, in the immediate posttest, the experimental group's error-free ratios increased to 88.2% while the control group improved only to 47.2%.

Improved use of the nouns by the experimental group was further investigated and categorized into three types: positive change, negative change, and no change. Positive changes were described as inappropriate or less appropriate use of the nouns in the pretest but appropriate use in the immediate posttest. Negative changes were appropriate use of the nouns in the pretest but less appropriate or inappropriate in the immediate posttest, and "no change" was described as inappropriate or less appropriate use of the nouns both in the pretest and the immediate posttest.

As can be seen from Figure 4, the instances of positive change (42 instances in total) outnumbered negative change (3 instances) and no change (6 instances). Table 2 provides examples of positive changes in using controversy, objection, and criticism by students in the experimental group. Two examples are given for each abstract noun.

Although the occurrences of positive change far outnumbered the other two categories, cases of negative change and no change in the immediate posttest still existed. These cases are illustrated in Table 3, which gives a list of examples of no change and negative change. For example, the error made by S3 in the pretest (i.e., in criticism way) was repeated in the immediate posttest (i.e., hold a criticism

Figure 3. Error-free ratios in the pretest and the immediate posttest



problem), where criticism was used to modify abstract nouns way and problem. It might be that this particular student intended to say in the pretest that the development of tourism should be taken into consideration critically. Similarly, in the immediate posttest, she repeated the wrong pattern by using criticism as a pre-modifier to follow a noun, while the correct use could probably be we should look at this problem critically.

Table 2. Examples of positive change in the experimental group

Student	Pretest	Immediate Posttest
S32	But when so many people pour into the beautiful scene, problem arises as well, which makes it <i>controversy</i> .	However, lottery games have provoked considerable <i>controversy</i> .
S13	In short, the <i>controversy</i> of the tourism is unlikely to end.	People waste a lot of money and time on it, which stirs considerable <i>controversy</i> .
S2	There are more and more people who are more in <i>objection</i> of tourism and the impact of tourism is in <i>controversy</i> .	The miseries brought about by lottery lead to great objection raised against lottery.
S18	Nowadays, some people have an opinion of <i>objection</i> towards tourism.	There are more and more people raising objection to the lottery.
S26	However, we should understand the situation in <i>criticism</i> .	Another criticism is that they are games which are easy to get addicted to.
S6	Between objection and agreement , I choose <i>criticism side</i> in all <i>controversy</i> .	Some people praise that lottery will be a boost to the country's domestic consumption while the lottery also came under intense <i>criticism</i> by other people.

Figure 4. Changes in using abstract nouns in the experimental group

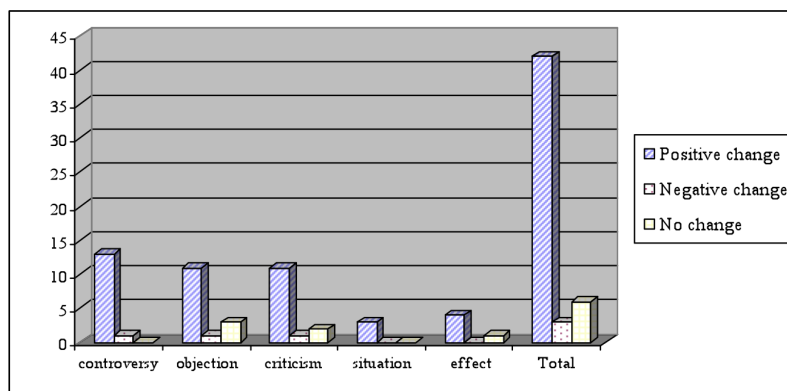
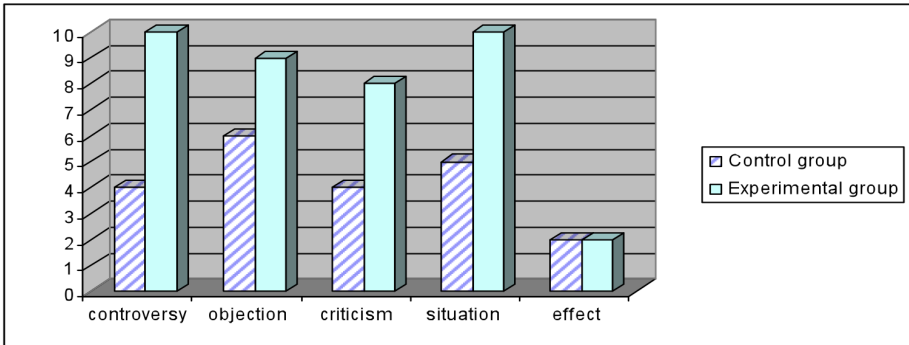


Table 3. Examples of no change and negative change in the experimental group

Student	Pretest	Immediate Posttest
S3	So, tourism should be taken into consideration in criticism way .	We should hold a criticism problem .
S26	Though it causes many problems and makes some bad effects on our environment, in objection , it is good for the development of our world.	The main objection of it is based on the fact that the rate of winning the prizes is far too small.
S15	Furthermore, from tourism, the countries can show every aspect to the world and have a better effect on foreigners.	Many people hold the objection against them because they ignore the bad effect of lottery games especially to the young children who have less control of themselves than adults do.

Figure 5. Distribution of grammatical patterns in the immediate posttest



From Figure 5, we can see an overview of grammatical structures of the five target nouns used in the immediate posttest between the two groups. Overall, all the target nouns, except effect, were used with more grammatical patterns by the experimental group than by the control group. The grammatical patterns of effect were equal in both groups. They fell into two types: (1) V + effect by collocating cause and have; and (2) effect + Copular Verb BE as Subject (e.g., Another negative effect is that lottery games have caused many crimes).

Table 5. Overall evaluation on the concordance exercises (n=20)

Category	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No Opinion (%)	Mean	S.D.
Overall evaluation on vocabulary learning	95	5	0	5.90	0.91
Overall evaluation on L2 writing	95	5	0	5.50	0.94
Increasing confidence about using the words in L2 writing	95	5	0	5.70	0.92
Expecting more concordance exercises in future writing	85	15	0	5.50	1.27
Prefer learning words from the concordance lines than being taught by teacher	70	30	0	4.90	1.51

*1-3 = disagree, 4= no opinion, 5-7 = agree.

Table 6. Problems in doing the concordance exercises (n=20)

Category	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No Opinion (%)	Mean	S.D.
Time-consuming	75	20	5	4.50	1.31
Unfamiliar vocabulary	80	10	10	4.75	1.16
Cut-off sentences	80	20	0	4.85	1.63
Too many sentences	65	30	5	4.40	1.42
Limited number of sentences	30	60	10	3.45	1.19
Difficulty in formulating the overall rules of the usage of the words	45	50	5	4	1.68

*1-3 = disagree, 4= no opinion, 5-7 = agree.

Student Views of the Concordance Exercises

The follow-up survey focused on two aspects of students' attitudes towards the corpus-informed materials: (1) overall evaluation of corpus-informed materials, and (2) difficulties in doing the concordance exercises.

As noted in Table 5, vocabulary learning ranked the top among the categories. About 95% of the students were favorable toward concordance exercises, reporting

that they were helpful for vocabulary learning and increasing confidence about using the words in L2 writing.

Although the mean responses in Table 5 indicate that the majority of the students had a favorable attitude towards corpus use for vocabulary learning and L2 writing, Table 6 reveals a different perspective with 75% of the responses showing that it was time-consuming to do concordance exercises. However, half of the students reported they did not have difficulty in formulating overall usage rules for the words. As the student LJR wrote, “I think there are too [many] contents which cost our lots of time. It would be better if there is less exercise or we just [under]line the answer in the content and not need to write it out.”

About 80 percent of the students had difficulty in doing the concordance exercises due to the cut-off sentences and the new words in concordances. The cut-off sentences (see the Appendix) hampered them in fully understanding the information presented in the concordance output. They remarked that the cut-off sentences prevented them from understanding the examples or the viewpoints from the sample texts in the concordance lines.

As one student commented:

However, the examples of the words using are not so perfect because some of them are just a part of a sentence, and we don't know what the whole meanings of the examples are. So these examples cannot well express the exact using of the words. Some of them just show the verbs or prepositions that can be used with them.

The cut-off sentences are the main reason for some students stating that topic-based concordance lines failed to provide them with ideas related to the writing topic. The students commented that it would be of help for them to grasp the ideas more thoroughly if they could go further into the full context of the target word and read the complete sentences or even the whole paragraph.

Discussion

A comparison of the holistic scores of the pretest, the immediate posttest and the delayed posttest did show that there was no statistically significant difference in overall writing quality between the control group and the experimental group. This finding indicates that the corpus-informed concordances did not

have a significant impact on students' writing outcomes in terms of overall writing quality.

However, L2 writing performance is subject to a number of linguistic variables besides vocabulary use. General ideas, text structures, grammatical use, and coherence and cohesion are equally vital factors that determine the overall writing quality. As an experimental study, this research was set up to elicit results within a fixed period of time. It is quite possible that the input of these five target vocabulary items would not make a difference in holistic writing scores within four weeks. In order to attain more desirable results of the effects of topic-specific corpus on overall writing ability, a long-term study with more lexical input in the form of concordances is worth carrying out.

Although there was no significant difference in the overall writing outcomes between the control and the experimental groups, the mean improvement of the experimental group in the immediate posttest was much higher than that of the control group. This could suggest that corpus-informed concordances did exert a positive effect on students' writing quality in the short term. This could be attributed to more accurate and complicated structural use of the target nouns after the treatment which may indicate that corpus-informed concordances are especially effective in helping learners to obtain lexico-grammatical patterns of the target nouns when compared with dictionary consultation. These types of learning resources have a notable effect on improving language use in L2 writing, particularly in relation to collocational uses and grammatical patterns. The effect is indeed twofold, which concerns both acquisition and production. First, it could help learners acquire a variety of collocational patterns. Second, acquisition of collocational patterns in turn would enable learners to generate more accurate and complex syntactic patterns.

Most encouraging was the students' positive views of the concordance exercises. In terms of their importance in vocabulary learning and improvement of writing ability, and enhancing confidence in using the new words in their writing, the overwhelming majority of students were strongly supportive of the concordance exercises.

The significant progress in using the target words in students' writing along with their overall positive attitudes towards corpus use testifies to the feasibility and usefulness of a corpus-informed approach to L2 writing instruction.

Conclusion

The findings in this study provide empirical evidence that corpora can be a useful resource for writing teachers to help students improve their lexicogrammatical use of vocabulary in their writing. The findings also indicate that the incorporation of corpus materials into writing instruction needs to be pedagogically mediated. In corpus-informed writing instruction, teachers play a central role from the initial stage of materials development to the implementation of corpus-related learning activities. For teacher practitioners, the statement by Johansson (2009) can be used as a gentle reminder that “corpora are important in basic research, and they have a role to play in the classroom as well. But let’s not exaggerate. Corpora are no replacement for natural communication. They cannot replace the teacher” (p. 42).

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Appendix: Excerpt of the corpus-informed material

Pre-writing vocabulary study

Directions: Study the concordance, underline or highlight the central group of words that stand alone, as has been done in the first example. Then answer the questions which follow. Do not worry that these are cut-off sentences—just familiarize yourself with the key words.

Objection

Study the lexico-grammatical patterns

Study the concordance lines of *objection* and answer the following questions.

1. Lottery was eventually approved. *Much of the objection to the National Lottery came from church leaders.*
2. profits to charity, but was rejected. *My personal objection to Camelot as the lottery organizer is that a large*
3. most famous businesses and Families had a particular **objection** to the start of the National Lottery.
4. All rely on participating viewers who *have no great objection to winning* their moment of glory by doing their best
5. harmless fun which won't break the bank. *The main objection to the lottery is based on the grounds that those who*
6. than that, a tax on the poor. *The main objection came from charities who predicted that charitable donate*
7. like horse-racing and casinos. *These objections became much greater with the introduction of scratch cards*
8. are how bitterly unpopular taxation is; therefore, **objections raised against the lottery concerned** it being marketed
9. or saving for a holiday or a car. *There were also objections raised to the amount of money the proposed jackpot was*
10. and psychological drawbacks. *There were two main objections against the introduction of the national lottery*
11. would have been donated to charity. *Another objection raised was that the National Lottery would*
12. The proposal of a lottery brought about *many objections and complaints.* There were, and still are, two
13. of conservative government ! *Despite the numerous objections, the introduction of the lottery has induced a 'fever*

- 1). Which adjectives are used before objection(s)?
Please write down the phrases. e.g., the main objection
- 2). Which verbs or verbs phrases are used with objection(s)?
Please write down the phrases.
- 3). Which preposition commonly follows objection(s)?
objection(s) _____

About The Author

Huang Zeping is a doctoral student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her interests are in second language writing and corpus linguistics. She has taught English in mainland China and in Hong Kong.

Willingness to Communicate and Communication Quality in ESL Classrooms

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Introduction

The premise of modern language teaching and learning is to provide learners with exposure to authentic language, as well as encouraging them to use the language for meaningful and effective communication. Given the importance of participation in authentic communication, some researchers (for example, Dornyei 2005; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels 1998) have argued that a fundamental goal of second language (L2) education should be the encouragement of learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the language learning process. WTC is expected to facilitate language learning because higher WTC among students translates into increased opportunity for authentic L2 use (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod 2001), which is a necessary condition for their language acquisition or development (MacIntyre & Legatoo 2011).

The WTC construct was originally introduced with reference to L1 communication, and was considered to be a personality-based, trait-like predisposition that remained stable across different communication situations (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). That is to say, WTC has been looked at as a trait disposition that is independent of what happens in contexts and seen as static. However, due to a greater range of uncertainty inherent in L2 use and inter-group issues carried by L2 use, WTC in L2 was proposed as a situational variable, open to change across situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998). From this perspective, WTC in L2 was defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

WTC within a classroom context has been defined as “a student’s intention to interact with others in the target language, given the chance to do so” (Oxford, 1997, p. 449). WTC in an L2 classroom concerns a student’s intention to communicate with interlocutors when free to do so. This is contrasted to a situation when a student is called upon by the teacher; he or she is obliged to respond without having much choice.

Some classroom-based WTC research has explored contextual factors affecting WTC in class, in particular in relation to task attitude, task type, and pre-task planning. The first study was conducted by Dörnyei and Kormos (2000), who investigated the effects of a number of affective and social variables such as motivation, L2 proficiency, WTC, group cohesiveness, and relationship with the interlocutor on L2 learners’ engagement in oral tasks. This study involved 46 participants at secondary schools in Hungary. Data were collected from oral tasks, questionnaires, and oral proficiency tests. The results indicated that the students’ WTC in the L2 classroom was influenced by their attitudes towards the task. Strong and positive correlations were found between learners’ WTC and the amount of L2 they produced when performing the task when learners held a positive attitude toward the task. However, there was no correlation between WTC and the amount of L2 produced in the case of learners with more negative attitudes toward the task.

Weaver’s studies examined situational variables underlying WTC in L2 classrooms in relation to task types. His 2004 study investigated Japanese learners’ WTC ($n = 1104$) within an L2 classroom at tertiary level. Unlike previous studies that exclusively adopted the WTC scale developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1991), this study used a questionnaire developed by the researcher himself to investigate whether or not learner’s L2 WTC would vary across 17 speaking situations and tasks potentially arising in this social context of a L2 classroom. The findings revealed that students’ WTC varied significantly across different speaking situations and tasks and suggest that task is a variable likely to contribute to changes in WTC in L2 classrooms.

In a subsequent study, Weaver (2005) followed an experimental design to investigate the effect of English instruction and pre-task planning on students’ level of WTC to do different speaking tasks within an oral communication class. The participants were asked to complete a survey in the first and last classes.

Weaver's study employed a WTC survey ($n = 490$) specifically designed for an L2 classroom. This survey was previously tested by using the Rasch model to confirm its usefulness in defining a range of indicators of L2 WTC among second language learners. Differing from the widely accepted WTC survey developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1991,) which was not restricted to instructional settings, this survey appears to be more relevant to an L2 classroom. The results showed post-instruction gains in terms of WTC, suggesting that pre-task planning has a positive effect on WTC.

A gap in the classroom WTC research lies in that no attempts have been made to investigate the relationship between WTC and actual communication quality. This research aims to explore the relationship between WTC and language quality in students' oral production. It also aims to explore the relationship between learners' WTC and actual classroom interaction. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between learners' WTC and oral communication quality?
2. What is the relationship between learners' WTC and their actual classroom interaction?

Method

Participants

Six students from an intact English for Academic Purposes (EAP) class at a university language center in New Zealand voluntarily participated in this study. At the time of data collection, the class was in the last three weeks of a one-month EAP module. The participants, whose ages ranged from 20 to 30, came from six different countries, including France, the Philippines, Japan, China, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. All but one had been in New Zealand for less than half a year at the time of the study. Most of them had been learning English in the home country for over 7 years. They were identified by the program as being at an advanced proficiency level (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Information

Code name	Mother tongue	Gender	Age	Length of time in NZ	Time studying L2
Joselito	Tagalog	Female	27	1-3 months	18 years
Takuya	Japanese	Male	20	4- 6 months	8 years
Shu-Wei	Mandarin	Male	26	4- 6 months	8 years
Fatima	Arabic	Female	30	4- 6 months	18 years
Umar	Arabic	Male	27	7-12 months	8 years
Ines	French	Female	22	1-3 months	7 years

Operationalizing WTC Behavior

In the present study, WTC is viewed as a dynamic rather than a trait phenomenon. It is seen as an interdependent concept in relation to learner-internal and learner-external factors. It is not defined as an intention; instead, it is operationalized for this study as occasions when learners initiate or engage in communication when they have a choice to engage or not. These occasions are observable behaviors during a class. Following Cao and Philp (2006), students' WTC in class (or WTC behavior) was further operationalized by an observation scheme, which included categories such as volunteering an answer/a comment, giving an answer to the teacher's question, asking the teacher a question/for clarification, guessing the meaning of an unknown word, trying out a difficult form in the target language, presenting one's own opinions in class/responding to an opinion, volunteering to participate in class activities, and talking to a neighbor/group member (see the appendix). These WTC categories represent a range of classroom behaviors demonstrated by L2 learners who show high WTC in class.

Data Collection

The study lasted 3 weeks and involved classroom observations and oral tests. Two hours of classroom observation were conducted each week for 3 weeks. During the observations, the participants recorded themselves by wearing

clip-on microphones attached to individual tape recorders. The researcher kept field notes relating to students' utterances and their nonverbal cues.

In Week 1 and Week 3 respectively, the participants performed three oral tasks individually with the researcher. (See description of oral tests in next section.) As far as possible, the conditions under which the tasks were introduced to the participants were kept identical and uniform across the two testing occasions. The wording of the instructions also remained the same. The participants did not know what they would be asked to do prior to any task, and they had no practice or preparation for the tasks. The participants performed the three tasks at each testing occasion, and the transition between the three tasks was made as smooth as possible. On no occasion did any of the participants receive any feedback on the task performance.

Oral Test Description

The oral test was comprised of oral production tasks that elicited three different task types: narrative, description, and personal story-telling. When performing the narrative pictorial task, the individual participants were shown a set of pictures that suggested a story and then given one minute of planning time in order to prepare the content of the narrative (Robinson, 1995). Then, they were invited to tell a coherent story illustrated by the pictures. For the picture description task, the students were asked to describe a picture and make a story about the scene. At some point in the description, they were expected to draw inferences from the limited information available in the picture.

The oral narrative task used in the present study has been widely used in research projects and is known as "The Supermarket" task (Yule, 1997). It is based on a series of cartoon strips originally designed to elicit referential communication. The story starts with a woman shopping at a supermarket where she meets a friend who has a small child riding in her shopping trolley. While they are chatting, the child takes a bottle of wine off the shelf and puts it in his mother's friend's handbag, which is on top of her own trolley. Nobody notices him trying to "help" with the shopping. However, his intention is to help get his mother's friend into trouble. At the checkout, the woman is stopped by the shop detective for shoplifting and then questioned by a policeman. The story has a clear beginning, development, and conclusion. A major referential problem designed into this task concerns where the bottle is placed by the child (Yule, 1997).

A similar version of the oral narrative task was produced for a second version of the test. Built into a slightly different narrative plot, this second version depicted a story set in a CD store. This time it was a little girl who went shopping with her mother. She put a CD in her mother's friend's bag. Her mother's friend discovered it and put it back. A twist in this story was that this girl made a second attempt by putting a CD in another customer's bag. When they were leaving the store, the customer was stopped by the shop detective.

The second task was a description task that used a picture which depicted a beach scene (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). The picture contained a number of elements, including three children playing a ball, a fat man reading a newspaper, a boy playing with sand, and a film crew shooting a movie with an audience watching. The participants were expected to be familiar with this beach scene and interested in the topic. The task posed a single demand on the participants—to describe what the people were doing in the picture. The task was a closed task with a convergent goal and a clear inherent structure. A similar version of the story used for the task described a campsite scene. Both versions contained roughly the same number of activities and the participants were expected to be familiar with typical holiday activities such as relaxing on the beach or camping.

The purpose of creating similar versions for both the narrative pictorial task and the picture description task was to allow a counterbalancing design to minimize any practice effect. The participants were randomly assigned to complete the two alternative versions of the oral narrative task with an interval of three weeks between each task.

The third task elicited a narrative account with no picture prompts. The participants were asked to talk about a past episode which they wanted to share, an event that had happened either in the distant or recent past and that stood out in their memory (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). This task had no contextual support and the number of elements varied according to the event being recalled by the participants. The information of the task was shared and the outcome of the task was open, allowing for divergent solutions.

All of the tasks were piloted on a number of native and non-native speakers with the aim of establishing baseline data from native speakers and ensuring that the tasks generated adequate quantities of talk (Bygate, 2001). Feedback from pilot participants was used to revise the task. The trial also aimed to establish a time limit for task completion.

Data Analysis

Data Segmentation

WTC ratio refers to the token of WTC behavior, which was calculated as a ratio of turns for each individual student. In order to calculate the ratio, sums for number of turns for each observed lesson were calculated respectively for teacher-fronted activities, group work, and pair work. Then, the teacher's turns were excluded from the three contexts. The remaining turns for each context were considered the total number of opportunities for the students to demonstrate their WTC behavior. The WTC ratio was then created for each participant by counting within each observed session the number of turns taken and comparing that against the total number of opportunities.

Learners' communication quality in interaction was operationalized as accuracy, fluency, and complexity in learners' speech production in the oral tests. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) point out, investigation of learner language in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity is "a particular view of L2 proficiency" (p. 140).

The first step in the analysis of learners' oral production involved segmenting the production into units. Instead of t-unit or c-unit, AS unit (described below) was used in the study because a measure of subordination based on AS units serves as an effective indicator of complexity for advanced level learners (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) and the participants were all at advanced levels of proficiency. An AS unit is defined as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with a subordinate clause(s) associated with either" (Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000, p.365).

Independent clause, sub-clausal unit, and subordinate clause are all exemplified below. In the following examples, an AS-unit boundary is marked with a slash (/) and a clause boundary is marked with a double colon (::).

1. An independent clause is minimally a clause including a finite verb:

/You should say that/

/Today she went to ACG/

2. An independent sub-clausal unit consists of either one or more phrases which can be elaborated to a full clause by means of recovery of ellipsed elements from the context of the discourse or situation, or a minor utterance, for example:

/bread and with some milk/

/bacterial infection/

3. A sub-ordinate clause consists minimally of a finite or non-finite verb element plus at least one other clause element (subject, object, complement or adverbial).

/the person has felt :: to expose himself :: to do such an experiment/ (3 clauses, 1 AS unit)

/I think :: I'll just stop it/ (2 clauses, 1 AS unit)

When segmenting the participants' production, false starts, functionless repetitions, and self-corrections were included within the AS-unit boundary while acknowledgements such as *yeah*, *yes*, *OK*, and *uhuh* were excluded.

Measuring Accuracy, Fluency, and Complexity

This study adopted widely used measures of accuracy by looking at the percentage of error-free clauses as a general measure and examining target-like use of vocabulary as a more specific measure of grammatical accuracy. An error-free clause means a clause in which there is no error in syntax, morphology, or word order. Errors in lexis were counted when the word used was incontrovertibly wrong. The percentage of error-free clauses was calculated as the number of error-free clauses divided by the total number of independent clauses, sub-clausal units, and subordinate clauses multiplied by 100 (Foster & Skehan, 1996). The percentage of target-like use of vocabulary was calculated as the percentage of clauses without lexical errors and the number of lexical errors divided by the total number of words in the text (Skehan & Foster, 1997).

Fluency was examined in terms of hesitation phenomena or dysfluency. The categories of dysfluency used in this study followed Foster and Skehan (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1999), which include reformulation, repetition,

replacement, and false starts. Reformulation refers to either phrase or clauses that are repeated with some modification to syntax, morphology, or word order. Repetition includes words, phrases, or clauses that are repeated with no modification whatsoever to syntax, morphology, or word order. Replacement involves lexical items that are immediately substituted for another. False starts are utterances that are abandoned before completion and that may or may not be followed by a reformulation. Fluency was coded as percentage of fluent clauses (clauses without reformulation, repetition, or false start) and the number of fluent clauses divided by the total number of AS units multiplied by 100.

Complexity measures used in this study included both grammatical and lexical complexity. Grammatically, complexity was coded as the amount of subordination/coordination and the total number of separate clauses divided by the total number of AS units (Foster & Skehan, 1996). Lexical richness is also a measure of complexity as some learners may employ simple grammatical structures but a wide range of words in their production (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Lexical complexity was measured as a segmental type-token ratio, which is the number of different lexical types as a proportion of total number of words used (token). This required dividing a learner's text into segments (eg. 50 words each) and calculating the type-token ratio of each segment. The mean score of all the segments was then calculated (Bygate, 1996; Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005).

To characterize the participants' classroom interaction, microgenetic analysis was adopted because it is a method widely employed in sociocultural research. Firstly, instances of language-related episodes (LRE) in classroom interaction were identified. An LRE is a unit of analysis which entails discussion of meaning or form. It is an instance of collaborative dialogues where students talk about the language they produce, question the language use, and either self-correct or other-correct their language production (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). An LRE entails both discussion of meaning and form (Swain, 2000, 2001). In Swain and associates' studies, there is a distinction between lexis-based and form-based LREs. Lexis-based LREs involve searching for vocabulary or choosing from competing vocabulary. Form-based LREs involve focusing on spelling or any aspect of morphology, syntax, or discourse. In the present study, form-based LREs also included discussing an aspect of phonology. Identification of LREs was then combined with an analysis of the way the students helped each other in peer interaction through assisted performance, using a subset of Ohta's (2001) scale.

Results

WTC and Communication Quality

The Wilcoxon signed ranks test, a non-parametric equivalent of paired sample t-test, was employed to assess differences in the accuracy, fluency, and complexity measures between the two oral tests. The results from the Wilcoxon signed ranks test indicated no significant differences between the two test results in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity ($Z = -0.524$, $p = 0.6$). The Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was then employed to identify relationships between WTC ratios and communication quality as measured in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Table 3 presents the coefficients as well as the mean and standard deviation for each variable. Spearman rank-order correlation shows strong positive correlations between the WTC ratio in Week 3 and complexity in the second test ($r = 1.000$, $p < 0.01$). The significantly strong positive correlation between WTC ratio and the complexity measure in the second test appears to indicate that the students with high WTC might tend to produce more complex utterances than those with low WTC. Since the study only lasted three weeks and there was not sufficient data, these findings only offer a very limited perspective of WTC behavior.

Table 3. Correlations between WTC Ratio and Task Performance in Oral Tests

Variables	Mean	SD	Week 1 Rank of	Week 3 Rank of
			WTC Ratio	WTC Ratio
Pre-test accuracy	68.65	10.9	-.600	
Pre-test fluency	53.4	16.6	-.086	
Pre-test complexity	1.45	0.2	-.429	
Post-test accuracy	72.15	9.7		.257
Post-test fluency	46.78	20.3		.143
Post-test complexity	1.51	0.28		1.000**

** $p < 0.01$

Table 4. Correlations between WTC Ratio and Length of Turn

Variables	Mean	SD	Turn Length Week 1	Turn Length Week 2	Turn Length Week 3
Week 1 Rank of WTC ratio	12.03	3.82	-.600	.143	-.543
Week 2 Rank of WTC ratio	12.87	2.87	-.600	-.486	.200
Week 3 Rank of WTC ratio	12.02	4.97	-.371	.429	-.600

** $p < 0.01$

To explore a possible relationship between WTC and actual engagement in communication, length of turn for each learner in class interactions was considered as another variable to measure engagement in communication. The results from the Friedman test showed the difference in length of turn from Week 1 to Week 3 as significant ($\chi^2(2, n=6) = 8.333, p < 0.05$). This could be due to the different tasks used in class for each week, which involved group/pair work and teacher-fronted activities to different degrees. The Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient was employed to identify relationships between WTC ratio and length of turn in classroom interaction in each week. These results, as well as the mean and standard deviation for each variable, are reported in Table 4. The Spearman rank-order correlation indicates no clear correlations between WTC ratio and length of turn in class interactions in any of the three weeks. In other words, there seems to be no clear relationship between initiation of communication (WTC) and actual engagement in communication.

WTC and Classroom Interaction

This section seeks to demonstrate how a learner's WTC relates to the way he or she interacts in class and the kinds of opportunities for communication he or she chooses. An analysis of the language-related episodes (LREs) in transcripts of classroom interaction from the 3 weeks generated some interesting results concerning learners' WTC and participation in classroom interaction with the

teacher and peers. Below are two examples showing the way the students sought and received assistance in communication with peers and the teacher.

Example 1 contains two examples of peer assistance. In line 1, Shu-wei had difficulty with vocabulary and Student Y provided the appropriate word in line 4. Another example is co-construction. Student A provided the first part of the sentence in line 9, which Shu-wei picked up and completed in line 10. This co-construction resulted in “vertical construction” (Ohta, 2001), in which peers collaboratively produce an utterance by alternately providing words or phrases to the growing utterance.

Example 1

- 1 S: And what (..) what country (...) we can ask XX next questions, how to say what's fact of after you no no no, how do you think the fact when people after
- 2 Y: When people are drunk
- 3 S: Yeah no after drunk maybe
- 4 Y: Hangover
- 5 S: Hang hangover
- 6 Y: After you drink XX
- 7 S: Yeah yeah effect your health or
- 8 Y: XX
- 9 A: What you do you know any effect?
- 10 S: On yourself on yourself after your drink
- 11 A: After your drinking
- 12 Y: On your health XX

Example 2 shows how the students handle a communication problem by consulting the teacher. Joeselito and Fatima failed to resolve a discrepancy in their answers in lines 2 to 6. They turned to the teacher for help. The teacher provided the correct answer in line 10 together with an explicit explanation in line 14. Seeking assistance from the teacher helped them notice the problem and receive further information regarding the item in question. By asking the teacher, Fatima assisted her partner Joeselito and also benefited herself. The difficulty with the choice of correct verb can be regarded as an affordance for both Fatima and Joeselito. The triadic interaction with the teacher provided Fatima an opportunity to see the information in a new light. Fatima's clarification about the choice of the verb with the teacher also reshaped and refined Joeselito's knowledge.

Example 2

- 1 J: At which age have you gone the surgery?
- 2 F: Have you done have you done?
- 3 J: Have you gone I think
- 4 F: Gone?
- 5 J: It's not it's not done because done is the one who the doctor done the surgery but you gone
- 6 F: Gone gone?
- 7 J: You can ask T
- 8 F: T, a question, it's here and here, it will be like how many how many times did you do or have you gone
- 9 J: how many times have you gone
- 10 T: How many times have you had
- 11 F: Have you OK

12 T: Have you had plastic surgery

13 F: At which age have you had also

14 T: Yes, have you had present perfect 'cos we're talking about in their life time

15 F: Your or a plastic surgery

16 T: How many times have you had a plastic surgery

Table 5 presents the number of assisted performance episodes in peer interaction for each student during the 3 weeks and Table 6 shows a comparison between the participants' instances of assisted performance and their WTC ratios in each lesson. According to Ohta's (2001) scale, co-construction represents a more implicit form of assistance, but asking the teacher for help is the most explicit type. As Table 5 shows, among all the instances of assisted performance over 3 weeks, Shu-wei, the student with the lowest WTC had the highest number of instances of receiving peer assistance. He co-constructed answers twice, asked for the teacher's help twice, and asked for his peer's assistance five times. Most of the time, the assistance was more on the explicit side. Fatima, the one with the highest WTC only had three instances of assisted performance.

Comparing these two students, Shu-wei, the student with the lowest WTC in pair/group work seemed to be more dependent on peers to do tasks and to offer minimum suggestions. On the other hand, Fatima, the student with the highest WTC in both whole-class situation and pair/group work, appeared to be a more independent learner who would initiate conversations and share opinions more frequently. The time for this 3-week study was too short to make any reliable statements as to whether students with low WTC, in pair/group interaction in particular, would tend to rely more on peer scaffolding and whether students with high WTC would be more likely to initiate conversations, give explanations, and express opinions. There seems to be a relationship between learners' situational WTC and type of contributions they make in class participation as well as the assistance they seek and receive from the teacher and their peers in classroom interaction. Further inquiry is needed to explore these possible relationships.

Table 5. Assisted Performance

Student	Seek help	Seek teacher's help	Receive assistance	Co-construct	Explain	Total
Fatima	1		1	1		3
<u>Joselito</u>				2		2
<u>Umar</u>	1			2	1	4
Ines		1	1	2		4
Takuya			1	3		4
<u>Shu-wei</u>		2	5	2		9
Total	2	3	8	12	1	26

Table 6. Comparison between WTC and Assisted Performance

Student	Number of assisted performance	WTC		
		Week 1 Ratio	Week 2 Ratio	Week 3 Ratio
Fatima	3	18.6	17.9	20.3
<u>Joselito</u>	2	9.3	13.2	9.3
<u>Umar</u>	4	10.6	10.2	14.4
Ines	4	10.4	10.9	10.6
Takuya	4	14.6	11	11.8
<u>Shu-wei</u>	9	8.7	14	5.7
Mean	4	12	12.9	12

Conclusions

The present study is part of a larger study and it was framed only as a small-scale exploratory study that reported on preliminary findings. Overall the findings of this study, notwithstanding its limitations, would shed light on possible relationships between learners' WTC and actual classroom interaction.

The significant positive correlation between the WTC ratio and complexity in the second oral test seemed to suggest that learners with higher WTC would be inclined to produce more complex language than the students with lower WTC. However, there appeared to be no clear correlations between WTC and length of turn in class interactions. Since the study only lasted three weeks and there was not sufficient data, these findings only offered a very limited perspective on WTC and language use.

The qualitative analysis of students' classroom interaction indicates a relationship between learners' situational WTC and the type of contributions they make in class participation and the assistance they seek and receive from the teacher and their peers in classroom interaction. Further inquiry is needed to explore this possible correlation. Further research is also required to investigate the relationship between the factors underlying their intention to participate and the quality of their participation that might have potential for language development.

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Appendix: Classroom Observation Scheme

WTC behavior categories (basis of tally chart for observation of individual students)

In the presence of the teacher

1. Volunteer an answer (including raising a hand).
2. Give an answer to the teacher's question:
 - (a). Provide information – general solicit.
 - (b). Non-public response.
3. Ask the teacher a question.
4. Guess the meaning of an unknown word.
5. Try out a difficult form in the target language (lexical/morphosyntactic).
6. Present own opinions in class.
7. Volunteer to participate in class activities.

Student to student OR student to class (part of a lesson or informal socializing)

1. Talk to the neighbor (explain something, ask a question or initiate a conversation).

2. Talk to a group member
3. Talk to a student from another group

Additional categories for pair and group work

1. Guess the meaning of an unknown word.
2. Ask group member/partner a question.
3. Give an answer to the teacher's question.
4. Talk to the neighbor/group member/a student from another group.
5. Try out a difficult form in the target language (lexical/morphosyntactic)
6. Present own opinions in pair/group.

Constraints on Language Teacher Autonomy: A Grounded Theory

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Introduction

Theory-driven studies on teacher autonomy may inculcate the idea of language teacher autonomy without any teaching constraints. This is unlikely in all but the most ideal circumstances. Thus there is an urgent need to investigate constraints on teacher autonomy if we are to engage successfully in pedagogy that utilizes teacher autonomy. To this end, this data-driven study aims at theoretically sampling and theorizing experienced EFL teachers' perspectives to uncover constraints on language teacher autonomy. The constant comparative technique and the analytic schemes of grounded theory were used to iteratively collect and analyse interview data.

This study is significant in that it gives voice to the oft-silenced group who are often at the consumer end of reform initiatives in education systems. To this end, the study is conducted *with* not *on* teachers. Theorising from teachers' voice, the study will shed some light on the rhetoric and research of language teacher autonomy. Moreover, the study is especially significant in that it is a shift away from theory-first research approaches which aim at improving teachers' work to a data-first mode of inquiry that aims at helping researchers and theorists improve their work through insights gained from theorizing teachers' views. In less technical terms, the study is significant since it provides an insiders' view of the language teaching constraints for researchers and theorists, who are typically outsiders to the actual process of teaching but aim at theorizing language teacher autonomy.

Language Teacher Autonomy: Rhetoric and Practice

Language teachers' professional life can be described at two levels: at the level of rhetoric and at the level of practice. At the level of rhetoric teachers can

be described as reflective practitioners who are granted the right to: (1) be free from control as well as actual freedom from control (Benson, 2000); (2) make choices concerning one's own teaching (Aoki, 2000); (3) develop appropriate teacher skills, knowledge, and attitudes for oneself in cooperation with others (Smith, 2000); (4) exercise professional freedom (McGrath, 2000); (5) cultivate a good environment for learners so that they acquire and practice the knowledge autonomously (Hui, 2010); (6) manage knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the students' acquisition of a language (Hui, 2010); and (7) develop learner autonomy (Munoz, 2007).

At the level of practice teachers are at best taken as expert technicians whose main professional expertise consists of applying externally produced knowledge rather than producing local, self-generated knowledge. While in theory teachers are allowed to manage knowledge, in practice educational knowledge is often constructed without the direct participation of teachers. In effect, language pedagogy is nothing more than telling teachers what they should do and think. As Smyth (1987) puts it, "The notion that there are some groups who are equipped through intelligence and training to articulate what another group *should do and think*, is an anti-educational view" (p. 6). While self-regulating their actions and behaviors, teachers, as members of a larger organization, are usually highly committed to the common good of the organization. In many countries and schools, teachers have little autonomy, as the system remains centralized, competitive, and bureaucratic. Critics of accountability and prescriptive instructional policies argue that these can narrow teachers' professional autonomy, discourage effective teaching, and focus on lower order learning opportunities (Jiménez Raya, 2007). Being at the consumer end of educational reform, teachers may see teacher autonomy as just one more imposition coming from above them which they are supposed to, somehow, implement (Bobb-Wolff, 2007).

Most proposals in the autonomy literature are so de-politicized that we run the risk of seeing pedagogy for autonomy merely as one methodological trend among others, rather than a value-laden choice (Vieira, 2006), especially through an emphasis on the psychological and methodological aspects of autonomy and overlooking its ideological underpinnings and implications (see Benson 1997). These proposals inculcate the idea that teachers teach in a vacuum. In practice teachers do not just teach; rather they teach in a social context. As salaried employees, they should comply with a set of organizational and social givens

that constrain their autonomy. Thus, rather than being in urgent need of more elaborate theories of autonomy that specify what language teacher autonomy entails, the field of language teacher education is in urgent need of data-first studies that aim at exploring and uncovering the conditions that constrain teacher autonomy since it is through identifying and improving the conditions that constrain teacher autonomy in varied contexts that the field can cultivate language teacher autonomy.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to uncover the constraints on teachers' work through interviewing experienced language teachers who are willing to share their experience with the researcher. More specifically, it aims to (1) describe teachers' action, (2) relate teachers' action to its underlying conditions, and (3) predict the consequences of this mode of action. In other words, the study aims at developing a grounded theory of language teachers' action which has descriptive, explanatory, and predictive power in Iranian public high schools.

Research Method

Participants

Theoretically relevant data were collected through interviews with six experienced language teachers willing to share their experience and views with the researcher. They were all selected from different high schools in Shiraz, a major city located in the eastern parts of the country. All of them were from urban areas. They were all male with more than 12 years of teaching experience. All of them majored in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Two of them had earned their master's degree and the others had earned their bachelor's degree. They were selected on the basis of their teaching experience and their willingness to share their views with the researcher because "understanding requires an openness to experience, a willingness to engage in a dialogue with one that challenges our understandings" (Schwandt, 1999, p. 458). On ethical grounds, early in the study the participants were ensured that the final report will reflect their pseudonyms rather than their real names.

Data Collection

Since the researcher wanted to enter the field with no preconceptions, the study began with the general question, “Are there any conditions in your work place that may possibly constrain your professional autonomy?” Following Glaser (2001), initial interviewing was a process of passive listening so as not to impose any pre-suppositions. Having analyzed initial data, the researcher posed more focused questions to collect theoretically relevant data. That is, instead of collecting data to answer pre-specified questions, the researcher aimed at corroborating in subsequent interviews emerged concepts and categories from an analysis of initial interviews. More specifically, once a constraining factor was uncovered, participants were asked to elaborate on how, when, why and that condition constrained their autonomy. Thus, instead of asking new questions in subsequent interviews, the researcher aimed at increasing the breadth and depth of emerged concepts and categories for the participants. However, instead of imposing emerged concepts and categories on the incoming data, the researcher constantly renamed and changed umbrella terms, i.e. concepts and categories to accommodate diversity in the data. Interviews varied in length from thirty minutes to one hour. All in all, fifteen hours of interview data were iteratively audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed to conceptualize participants’ views.

Data Analysis

The heart of data analysis in grounded theory is based on three types of coding procedures: open, axial, and selective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the researcher tried to read transcripts, highlight critical instances, and turn these instances into concepts which maximally describe and summarize them. This process is similar to turning students’ scores into an arithmetic mean to describe classroom performance on a test. Having identified concepts and categories, the researcher worked through transcripts to collect numerous illustrative quotes. Open coding resulted in summarizing and classifying participants’ views. In axial coding, the researcher refined categories, amalgamated some, made connections between the categories, and expanded the categories in terms of their properties. Finally, selective coding led to the emergence of the core category, a conceptualisation which had the analytic power to pull together all the conditions that constrained teacher autonomy.

Trustworthiness

The researcher's extensive experience as a language teacher for 10 years working under the same conditions as the participants provided him with theoretical sensitivity to sift through the data and identify the prominent categories. Having determined the prominent concepts and categories, the researcher reviewed an unmarked transcript, to see if any new concepts or categories emerged, and also to see if the identified categories made sense within the general context of the interviews. Thus, the building blocks of the theory were developed through the constant comparative techniques of grounded theory. The final conceptualization, including all concepts and categories as well as the core category, was verified through member checking, which is showing the final conceptualization to the participants to approve its credibility.

Limitations

Despite the participants' validation of the emerged concepts and categories and the researcher's attempts to triangulate the data against official documents, readers should proceed with caution as they read the findings. Qualitative researchers are instruments for gathering data, and as human beings, they bring with them their own constructions of the world. Despite methodological rigor, however, findings such as these are not a guarantee of truth, for truths are always partial (Clifford, 1986), and knowledge is "situated" (Haraway, 1988). We also cannot ignore how interviewer and interviewee negotiate face or manage impressions in interviews (Goffman, 1959). An interview is but a snapshot in time. Much is left unsaid about events and persons despite the intention of the interviewer to provide a holistic account. Of course, more interviews and stories would deepen our understanding of this exploratory study. Still, the researcher is confident that the categories identified represent a subset of a larger set of macro-structures constraining language teachers autonomy in public high schools in Iran.

Results

Summary of the Theory

The constant comparative technique, theoretical sampling, and the analytic schemes of grounded theory yielded *teaching as a determined act* as the core

theoretical category. Not only does this conceptualization *describe* teaching, but also it relates this mode of action to the constraints that bring it about (explanation) and the consequences of accepting this conformist approach (prediction). First, *binding directives and circulars* specify a set of permissible actions. These sets of actions are then naturalised as good practice through *teaching teams*, the *teacher evaluation scheme*, and the *teacher promotion scheme*. These conditions turn language teaching from an autonomous act into a determined act. Accepting these conditions entails *deskilling* since language teachers don't use their knowledge and skills and over time lose control of the processes and tasks they felt responsible for as teachers (Kelchtermans, 2005). Challenging these constraints, on the other hand, entails *marginalization*. What follows is a detailed elucidation of the theory.

Binding Directives and Circulars

Directives and circulars—teaching and testing prescriptions issued by the central agency—suppress creativity in teaching and overemphasise convergent teaching by imposing uniform conditions on teachers working under totally varied conditions. When central agencies impose a strong sense of what teachers should be doing, then there is no space for teachers to reflect on their practice to improve it. They see themselves at the consumer end of educational initiatives.

Top-down policies and initiatives inculcate the idea that others' knowledge is superior to teachers' own knowledge. Once they are issued, the principal imposes them on teachers' work. Under such conditions teachers feel excluded in educational decisions. They see their role as following the directives instead of being directed by professional knowledge and experience. In the comment below, Omid cogently explained how directives shape his practice:

Directives are license for action, just like the driver's license. If you are the best driver but you don't have the license you can't drive. On the other hand, having a driver's license allows you to drive even though you don't have the potential to drive. Likewise, we cannot teach without following the directives. Following the directives, one can teach without having the practical knowledge of teaching since he or she is following the directives rather than knowledge and experience.

Directives have a similar meaning for Ali. He believes that good teaching involves being aware of and understanding the meaning of directives:

We must follow educational directives and circulars issued by the central bureau of education. If we do otherwise, we will be questioned. For the principal of this high school, a good teacher is the one who heeds directives, understands them, and implements them.

These comments clearly indicate that teaching is externally controlled. But control is not limited to teaching. Testing is likewise controlled by those outside the education circle. Hamid's comments illuminate the teacher's role in testing:

I must test as the testing scheme dictates. Every year a mandated national testing scheme is sent to teachers. It clearly specifies the how and what of testing. Little divergence from the instructions entails being reproached by the colleagues, students, and principal. Convergence with the scheme, on the other hand, guarantees voice and popularity. Thus, I follow their initiatives and I am rewarded for acting in tune with their prescriptions and proscriptions.

Teaching Teams

Within each high school, teachers are divided into teaching teams of around five to ten people. Teaching teams are appointed a formal leader. Every teaching team holds regular meetings, usually once a month, where work is planned and monitored. Within the teaching team the teachers are involved in each other's teaching. This means that teachers can no longer isolate themselves from their colleagues and decide completely on their own as to where, when, and how teaching will be done.

The organisational division to which the teachers are subjected implies a commitment to the teaching team to which one belongs. It is no longer possible for teachers to isolate themselves and decide how to teach. It is no longer up to the individual teacher to determine the structure and content of the class, and decisions are instead made within the teaching team to which one belongs. Hence, adaptability is important. The head teacher acts in tune with the top-down directives and circulars and directs teaching teams towards top-down policies and agendas. Instead of focusing on individual teachers' creativity and initiatives, teachers are all forced into compliance with circulars and directives so that

nearly all teachers act and think in the same way. The individual teacher becomes subject to closer scrutiny, primarily by his or her head teacher. Reza's complaints demonstrate how teaching teams and head teachers shape teachers' practice:

In teaching teams the head teacher decides. His decisions are in line with top-down initiatives. The head teacher rewards language teachers who follow the circulars and directives rather than the teachers who follow their own plans of action.

Similarly Omid complains that his teaching is no longer in line with his own professional views. Rather it is the perspectives of the head teacher and his colleague that shape his teaching. His response reveals that he does not consent with this scenario:

The head teacher has a managerial function rather than an educational one because he reinforces conformity rather than teachers' personal approach. You have to change many times over the years and re-assess your own values. Take up new positions, from different standpoints. And it's important to be able to see how other teachers think in teaching teams. You are a good teacher to the extent that your teaching complies with that of your colleagues. There is a stigma attached to any divergence from accepted norms. What is promoted in teaching teams is normal teaching rather than creative, responsive teaching.

Teacher Evaluation Scheme

Teacher evaluation has a control function in that teachers, who know they are being evaluated, are always conscious of the consequences of their actions. They are thus less likely to violate norms designed to sustain the efficiency agenda that defines teaching success in term of students' pass rate in the final exam. The institutional arrangements and evaluation scheme makes even the most able and intellectual teachers tone down their teaching to the level of the approved acts. Evaluation is dead and deaf to teaching as a professional activity because teachers of all school subjects are evaluated by one and the same scheme. Interviews show that dedicated teachers who try to improve their practice are severely dissatisfied with the evaluation scheme. Rather than measuring teachers' professional knowledge and skills, the scheme measures their conformity

with rules and regulations. Ahmad's concise and precise comment on the scope of the evaluation scheme better reveals its hidden agenda:

The teacher evaluation scheme measures factors such as punctuality, clothes, teachers' conduct in the classroom, and observation of educational norms. Thus, rather than motivating teachers to excel, it forces them to be normal. The items in the scheme do not measure one's professional expertise. Rather they measure the extent to which one adapts to prescriptions and proscriptions imposed on teachers from the central office.

When teachers can no longer rely on their professional expertise, then there is a great risk that their professional pride will be eroded. The dilemma of professional pride easily becomes an issue when non-professionals are involved in deciding what good teaching involves. Under such conditions, there remains no room for professional pride when non-professionals evaluate teachers. This is a matter of considerable concern Behzad when he complains:

Officials rather than professionals define merit. Even in selecting teachers for beacon schools and merit schools, head teachers are consulted. My evaluation score depends on the head teachers' subjective idea. To keep my position in the high school, I must do as he wishes.

Reza's comments complement Behzad's concerns. While Behzad worries about being evaluated by non-professionals, Reza expresses deep sorrow about being evaluated with non-professional criteria when he says:

We don't have any subject-specific evaluation scheme for language teachers. Teachers of all school subjects are evaluated with the same scheme. The scheme does not differentiate between workers working in factories and teachers. The evaluation scheme was not developed by the Ministry of Education. It was developed by Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Our officials seem to feel that the only way to ensure that good education is going on in individual schools and classrooms is to control teachers' practice through checking their pass rate in the final exams; that is, they stick to the efficiency agenda by measuring teachers' success by the yardstick of the pass rate. Since a high pass rate is positively reinforced, teachers are disciplined to reduce the universe of possible pedagogic acts to ones that guarantee high pass

rate. Evaluation is a disciplinary mechanism that has normalised high pass rate as the ideal. Omid's comments clearly indicate that the externally imposed yardstick of success is a major factor jeopardizing teachers' work. Explaining the criterion of success he says:

I am judged by my students' pass rate in the final exams rather than by my teaching techniques and approach. If students fail, the teacher is reproached. This is not fair. Students may fail for a multitude of unknown reasons. The test does not test communicative competence. If all my students can communicate but they can't pass the final exam, I will face various punitive measures. Very early in my career I found that I am responsible for students' scores rather than their communicative capacity. This awareness helped me to gain the highest pass rate in the past three years.

Teacher Promotion Scheme

According to Dreeben (1970) teachers are salaried employees; they agree, through a written (or unwritten but formal) contract with a school board, on what tasks they shall perform in exchange for pay. That is, circulars and directives define a particular set of permissible acts. Promotion is a coherent system of rewarding compliance with the agreed tasks. Teachers are rewarded in one way or another when they are engaged in the defined acts. One of the subconsciously agreed upon tasks is efficiency in terms of pass rate and final scores. Promotion is a mechanism of rewarding efficiency. Reza's comments demonstrate how teacher evaluation is contingent upon pass rate:

The director general gave me the award of advanced skills not for my knowledge but for my pass rate in the final exam. He wrote, "We hereby thank you for your ceaseless effort which led to 100% pass rate in the finals of 2009. 100% pass rate is evidence enough to grant you the award of advanced skills. Since I had the highest pass rate in the past few years, they assigned me to the managerial post. Now I am the principal.

Omid corroborates the foregoing comments when he complains that his knowledge and skills in language teaching are not recognized. He puts his concerns this way:

Promotion depends on years of experience and pass rate. I am not promoted for my teaching skills and knowledge. I am promoted if I have an acceptable pass rate.

Promotion criteria normalise and reinforce a set of non-professional activities. It plays an important part in the creation of disciplined teachers, that is, individuals who conformed to defined activities. Thus, promotion criteria have been designed to normalise a certain mode of thought and action as the culturally valued mode. Promotion is the disciplinary technology that allows for a clear and precise measurement of those attributes which people in power deem important enough to order and manage. In this sense, we can see promotion as an important disciplinary mechanism that creates conformity. Conformity is not the result of overt force that visibly bends the will of those subject to its operation; conformity results from the constant working of invisible constraints that bring us all toward the same normal range of practices and beliefs. To see how promotion criteria normalise a specific set of acts, take Ahmad's comments:

I have to withdraw from my own initiatives and follow the prescriptions of others. It is only by following the system that I am rewarded. Every bonus is for those who follow the system. For instance, teachers of beacon schools are not selected based on their performance in a test or observation of their teaching skills; they are selected because their approach is in tune with top-down rules and regulations.

Reza also believes that teachers are promoted if they are disciplined, in other words, do as they are told. He explains that convergence entails promotion and divergence entails marginalisation and loss of voice. His own comments better illustrate this conformist scenario:

Those who have forgotten all the principles of language teaching are promoted just because they do what they are told. If you follow your own initiative or if you respond to students' communicative needs, you are marginalized. The reason is that students' communicative ability is not measured in the final exams.

Teachers are aware of the fact that what they do in the classroom is not professionally justified. However, they forsake their professional knowledge and

conscience because they are sure that they are promoted only if they do as they are told. Ahmad's points better explain this issue:

I will be promoted if I participate in a set of non-professional activities favoured and specified by the education system. If you participate in cultural activities specified by the directives for four years, you receive one grade. The credit is equivalent to the credit you receive by promoting yourself from BA to MA.

Consequences

Deskilling

Binding circulars together with directed promotion and evaluation delimit practice by impeding the prosecution of strategies and techniques supported by the principles of language learning and teaching and reinforcing conformity with rules and regulation. In other words, the circulars and promotion and evaluation schemes discipline teachers to do as they are told. Thus, instead of following a reflective approach and developing their practice, teachers follow a disciplined approach and wait for externally produced plans. Since all planning is done by officials, not teachers, the consequences of this are profound for teachers' professional life. Teachers' complaints are indicative of two destructive consequences.

The first is what we shall call the separation of competence from performance in teaching. Being externally controlled, teachers' performance is no longer directed by their competence. When central agencies have a strong and heavily loaded sense of what teachers' should be doing, then there will be little time to consider what teachers themselves think about teaching. In the long run teachers lose sight of the whole process and lose control over their own practice, since someone outside the immediate situation now has greater control over both the planning and what is actually happening. Reza vividly explains how his performance in testing and teaching is detached from his competence in these areas:

Instead of following fundamental concepts of testing English, I develop tests by following the instructions given in the testing scheme. Instead of being directed by principles of language teaching, my teaching approach is shaped by the fixed testing scheme imposed by central agencies. Thus, instead of

using my knowledge of methodology to respond to learners' needs, I teach to the test by responding to the demands of the scheme.

The second consequence is related, but adds a further debilitating characteristic. This is known as deskilling. As teachers lose control over their own labour, the skills that they have developed over the years atrophy. They are slowly lost, thereby making it even easier for officials to increase control of one's job because the skills of planning and controlling oneself are no longer available. A general principle emerges here: in one's labour; lack of use leads to loss. To better understand how language teachers in public high schools in Iran lose their knowledge and skills over time, take Omid's points.

When I entered the profession, I was fluent. I have a disempowering exit. I have lost my proficiency because all the way I followed a monolingual approach, i.e., I taught English through Persian. I have become an expert in preparing students for centrally planned tests. I have forgotten the techniques of language teaching because I could never use them. My teaching experience in public high schools deprived me of two precious things: my knowledge of language teaching and my fluency in using the English language.

Marginalization

While convergent practitioners are promoted at the cost of their professional knowledge, there are some that are marginalized because of their divergent approach. Their complaints are indicative of a sense of lost opportunity, lost voice, and lost position. Divergent teachers lack credibility and are not able to negotiate the right to speak on educational matters. These teachers complain that they have lost many chances of promotion because they resisted limiting conditions. To improve students' learning, these teachers tried to challenge disempowering conditions. Instead of being rewarded for their endeavors, they are deprived of many opportunities because the principal evaluates their work negatively. Negative evaluation entails being sent to schools that have been designated as failing. Reza, a divergent practitioner, complains:

Since the principal does not favor my approach, he deprived me of the summer courses in which teachers are paid well. Two years ago, I was assigned to develop the final exam. My questions were not in line with

their expectations. My colleagues and the principal reproached me. I lost the chance of constructing final examinations forever. I teach in this remote area, I have lost many credits, merely because I don't allow non-professional intervention.

Language teacher promotion depends on the subjective judgment of the principal and the subjective judgment of the principal depends on students' pass rate on the final exams rather than teachers' effective use of principles, techniques, and strategies in language teaching. Officials take pass rates as the only yardstick of success and some teachers inflate students' pass rate to guarantee their promotion and popularity. Omid who is a divergent practitioner complains:

I teach in this remote high school because my students' scores reflect their performance on the final exam. They want me to inflate students' scores like other teachers. I don't, and I will never do such a thing. Neither the students nor the principal likes this. I am taken as a bad teacher because my students' scores are lower than that of my other colleague. Pass rate is not indicative of learning. To ensure a high pass rate, some teachers teach selectively only the parts that are covered in the test and leave out the other parts covering oral activities. In the last thirteen years, I have never been rewarded merely because I do not teach to the test to inflate students' scores. If you try to improve your teaching performance through reflective practice, you are never promoted.

Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

To take structural parameters of practice into account, research approaches moved from the quantitative, positivistic to more narrative-based research that relied on teacher stories as a base of information about teacher knowledge (Carter, 1993). The results of this research does not lead to the development of generalisations of sample-based findings to population descriptions and explanations that are fundamental to positivistic research, but rather to the framing of patterns with respect to certain themes. Generalisations from this latter form are not laws to which we have to conform in order to be effective, but explanatory propositions with which we can make sense of the dilemmas and problems of teaching (Carter, 1993).

Teaching occurs within a structural context which Cornbleth (1990) argues is the “education system’s established roles and relationships, including operating procedures, shared beliefs and norms...often distinguished as organisation and culture” (p. 35). Decisions made at all levels throughout the education system, from the central government authority to the school committee, will impact on classroom practice. These decisions may impede or improve teacher autonomy.

To ensure that decisions made at the top of the hierarchy are implemented by those at the bottom of the hierarchy, teachers are exposed to disciplining. According to Foucault (1977), discipline is an effective means of controlling and being able to predict such matters as employee behaviour. The role of discipline is to ensure that many people do their job in a uniform manner and with identical results. To control teachers’ behaviour and make it predictable, first permissible acts are issued periodically through circulars and directives. They are then reinforced through teaching teams, evaluation, and promotion. That is, they act synergistically to condition teachers to teach in a predictable manner since some form of uniformity and structure is required for an organisation to function and individuals are thus assumed to be able to renounce certain of their own desires for the good of the collective. Since teachers’ actions are directed by forces external to themselves, teaching can be described as a determined act.

However, it is characteristic of professional operations that the professionals themselves hold a mandate to decide what the job should consist of, how it is to be done, and determine when it has been done well. If teaching is to be professionalised in our high schools, disciplinary power must subordinate teacher power. Only then can teachers challenge forces that systematically de-skill them. They should be trusted to criticise evaluation and promotion criteria from the perspective of their own classroom practices. Professionals must have the autonomy to make decisions that marry skills with knowledge (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). As Maxcy (1991) argued:

Professionalism implies a kind of normative power. Educational professionals ought to have the power to form directives for action with regard to problems arising out of the exercise of their skills and expertise. Teaching professionals ought to have the power to make policy and policy decisions. By professionalism, I have in mind power being placed in the hands of educators such that they may possess leadership in policy and decision making affecting learning in schools (p. 160).

To improve the working conditions of language teachers in the context of this study and other similar contexts, the field is in an urgent need of a shift in attitude and action towards language teachers' work at the level of information, policy, and action. More specifically, teacher autonomy remains at the level of rhetoric unless researchers, policy makers, and teachers show a wholehearted willingness to change their mode of thought and action.

To this end, three changes are essential. First, researchers must shift away from theory-first studies that aim at improving language teaching practice towards data-first studies that aim at theorizing language teachers' concerns about teacher autonomy so as to enlighten the rhetoric of teacher autonomy and come up with propositions and hypotheses that are deeply grounded in practice rather than taken from fashionable theories of the day. Second, policy makers at different levels of education hierarchy must heed the research findings and make informed, data-based reform decisions rather than impressionistic and subjective decisions. More specifically, it is essential that policy makers trust research findings and let teachers experiment with their educational initiatives and innovation rather than comply with top-down policies. Third, teachers must initiate reform from the bottom-up by critically reflecting on their action, systematically theorizing their views, informing and persuading school principals, local authorities, and the central agency of education as well as educators and researchers through action research and pilot studies. That is, to move away from the consumer end of educational reform, it is important that each and every language teacher define his or her identity as a teacher-researcher rather than a teacher.

Earlier in the article, the researcher proposed that both internal and external constraints jeopardize language teacher autonomy. This study tried to uncover and conceptualize external factors that constrain language teacher autonomy. Since the constraints on teacher autonomy conceptualized in this study are not inclusive, more studies in similar contexts would uncover more external constraints on teacher autonomy. Moreover, further data-first studies need to be undertaken by interested researchers to uncover constraints internal to the language teachers including their untested hypotheses, limiting beliefs and views, and habituated, taken-for-granted teaching strategies. It is through the uncovering, conceptualizing, theorizing, and hypothesizing teachers' concerns about autonomous teaching that we can move away from the rhetoric of language teacher autonomy to teacher autonomy in practice.

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Tips for Teachers

Using Debate to Strengthen Academic Writing

Rachel Bradshaw, Josiah Quincy High School, Boston, MA

I teach English in an ethnically and linguistically diverse urban high school. About half of its students are the children of immigrants from East Asia or the Caribbean and speak languages other than English at home. Most, native speakers as well as English language learners (ELLs), would be considered “disadvantaged” or lacking the social and economic capital they need to be well prepared for further education or training. While the reasons for their difficulties may vary, both the native speakers and the ELLs are below grade level readers and astonishingly weak academic writers. Nevertheless, many aspire to further education after high school, and most who reach this goal are the first in their families to do so.

Last year, I became the school debate coach. In that capacity, I saw students, including some of my own struggling readers and writers, engaged in a verbal activity where they excelled: face-to-face debate. I began to wonder whether their oral language skills might somehow be used to strengthen their writing. One day, after reading a typical set of disappointing homework papers written by my eleventh graders, I saw a way to examine the relationship between their speaking and writing skills.

We were reading Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and I had asked my students to write a one-page paper stating whether Maya or Glory deals more effectively with the overbearing Mrs. Cullinan. No one wrote more than a third of a page, and some wrote only one sentence. Only two of twenty quoted any textual evidence to support their opinions. There were circular arguments: “Glory deals better with Mrs. Cullinan because Maya couldn’t handle with Mrs. Cullinan.” There were non sequiturs: “I think Glory is because she was a descendant of slaves that had worked for the Cullinans.” There was simple summarizing: “Maya doesn’t like Mrs. Cullinan because she call her by the wrong name and Glory is her mistress and she is used to serve her.” And everywhere, there were developmental English errors, as well as errors in spelling, punctuation, and word choice. Instead of marking and grading each paper individually, as I would normally have done, I tried this series of steps:

1. I removed student names from the papers, photocopied them, and handed them out in packets the next day.
2. I asked for two volunteers to come forward to hold a brief debate. One would defend Glory's approach to dealing with Mrs. Cullinan, and the other would defend Maya's approach. The only catch was that each had to choose one response from the packet of homework writings to read aloud, verbatim, as her opening statement.
3. I gave the debaters time to search through the packet of collected writings to find the words they wanted to use in their debate.

The rest of the class cheered and then jeered as they realized just how weak the arguments were. "I can't even read this!" the debaters exclaimed. "This has nothing to do with the question!" "This is going to be the worst speech ever!" And finally, turning to me: "Do we really write like this? I'm ashamed!" The "debate," of course, was hilarious, a total failure on both sides, but individual debaters were not embarrassed. After all, they were just reading what other people had written, and the class as a whole immediately recognized the connection between good writing and good debating: if a response to a controversial question cannot fare well in a debate, it is probably not very well written.

4. Afterward, I told the class that their new homework assignment was to rewrite their responses for use in a new round of debates.
5. Over the next few days, I repeated the process twice more. Thus, students wrote three drafts and held a series of three debates.
6. After each debate, I allowed time for debriefing and reflection. By participating in and observing the debates, students gradually discovered, on their own, a need to add content, improve organization, and use more specific vocabulary. They also discovered the thrill of crafting a winning argument. One student voiced this discovery saying, "This is better, but I'm still losing the debate."

Final drafts were not perfect, but they were substantially better than the original papers. The shortest response was a third of a page, the same length as the longest response in the first round. Eight of eleven included at least

one quotation from the text, and five used more than one quotation. Even the handwriting was neater. A student who had written three sentences on his first attempt, including one of those quoted above, produced a third draft of a page and a half with evidence-based arguments including no fewer than eight quotations from the text. His last sentence summed up his main point: “Therefore, Glory deals better with Mrs. Cullinan because Glory didn’t caused any big trouble for Mrs. Cullinan.”

Responses were not only solidly supported; they were also more sophisticated and better organized. No longer satisfied with simple arguments, some students developed multi-faceted attacks. Accordingly, topic sentences like “I think Maya deals better than Glory with Mrs. Cullinan for few reasons” and organizing expressions such as *first* and *lastly* made an appearance for the first time. One student, who had written only one sentence on her first draft, ended the project with a solid paragraph in which she used two supporting quotes and expressions like *on the other hand* to manage her argument. Perhaps most impressive of all, another student (a debate team member, incidentally, and a non-native speaker of English) even began to anticipate and refute possible counterarguments, a skill I had not yet taught explicitly.

It is important to note that I had been telling my students for months everything that they learned to do on their own in these three days. They had heard me say repeatedly to focus, clarify, organize, and support their arguments—but until the first debate, they were unable to do so. Whether they lacked understanding, purpose, motivation, vocabulary, or examples, debate provided what they needed. Perhaps most importantly, their writing was now addressed to a skeptical audience rather than to a vacuum, and that made all the difference. It was real, and therefore it was good.

Conclusion

The series of activities described here benefited all of my students, both native and non-native speakers of English. Teachers in both ESL and EFL settings, particularly those teaching IELTS or TOEFL preparation courses, may find that incorporating an element of oral discussion or debate into their writing process could help students envision an audience and write with a purpose.

About the Author

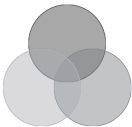
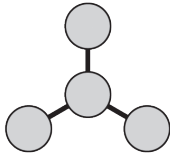
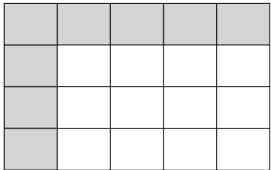
Rachel Bradshaw teaches high school English and coaches policy debate in Boston, MA, where she participates in the Boston Debate League's Evidence-Based Argumentation Initiative, a program designed to increase rigor and engagement by bringing elements of debate into the classroom.

Facilitating Communication with Graphic Organizers

James W. Porcaro, Toyama University of International Studies, Toyama, Japan

In many corners of the world, English language textbook tasks are dull, difficult, or demotivating. Even when books are appropriate and attractive, teachers must adjust them to address individual student needs, interests, and goals. Sooner or later, most language teachers begin to design their own instructional materials to supplement or replace their course textbooks. I have found that graphic organizers provide a quick and easy way to develop engaging, student-centered supplemental materials.

A graphic organizer is a visual display of information used to show the relationship between ideas. Three common graphic organizers that are available in word processing programs are shown here. Many more are freely available online.

Venn diagram	Bubble chart	Table, chart, or grid
		

Graphic organizers come in many forms and are referred to with many names including, but not limited to chains, charts, clouds, clusters, diagrams, graphs, grids, semantic maps, and tables. They are common in textbooks and other learning materials across the curriculum in math, science, and social studies, for example, but they are also authentic—used in “the real world,” in print, on television, and online to show chronology, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, stages in a process, classification, parts of a whole, and so forth. They communicate these relationships directly, with visual cues rather than with wordy text, and this is why they are such valuable tools for language classrooms.

Graphic organizers help language learners. When an English activity includes a graphic organizer, students can readily see the target concept, along with

key vocabulary and structures that they need to perform the task. The graphic information is an attention-getter which leads them to think, “I can do this,” and they can jump into the activity after a brief introduction and directions. The graphic organizer helps them sort information, connect ideas, and apply elements of critical thinking such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference but without needing to read or listen to difficult words of explanation from a textbook or teacher.

Graphic organizers also help teachers. Teachers cannot merely tell students to “talk about” the prompt in their textbooks if they lack the vocabulary or fluency to begin or sustain the conversation. Similarly, teachers may wish to introduce a new activity, procedure, or game to foster language practice, but detailed directions or procedures are unlikely to be understood well. Bilingual teachers often resort to repeating directions in the students’ first language. Unfortunately, this does not ensure that students will understand the concept or how to do the task. To make matters worse, they lose credibility if they ask or expect students to speak English when they themselves have found it too difficult to give effective instructions using English. Finally in programs with high expectations and little time for communicative practice, using and reusing familiar graphic organizers can save valuable instructional time.

Once teachers begin to make use of graphic organizers, they will be surprised by how easy it is to engage students in the oral or written use of English. They will also begin to find more and more applications for each particular organizer that they try.

An Example—Using a Graphic Organizer to Talk About the Future

Years ago, I designed the simple grid that appears in the Appendix. Over the years, I have adapted it for use with many different student groups. Activities using this grid are always successful thanks to the simplicity and utility of the graphic organizer. It asks students to imagine what their lives might be like in the near and distant future as well as what they imagine life in their own country and in the world at large might be like in those same periods. The grid can be adapted or adjusted in many ways.

1. First and foremost, the language focus of the grid is flexible. The fortune teller example in the Appendix focuses on the future. I might begin with *will* and *be going to*, but depending on the group or the lesson, I can also use

- future continuous tense as in *In 20 years I'll be working in China.*
- future conditional: *If climate change continues, lifestyles will be greatly changed.*
- future perfect tense: *In 50 years, the population of Japan will have dropped to about 90 million.*

The grid works not only for verb forms but for nearly any other target expression or structure that students need to practice or review.

2. The grid can be adapted for different kinds of interaction. The example in the Appendix can be used to prepare students for face-to-face classroom interaction or for individual writing tasks. With guiding questions down the left and space for classmates' names across the top, it becomes a survey. With a target expression such as *Suppose you need...* as the title, needs down the left, and people (e.g. friend, parents, and loan officer) across the top, it becomes a discussion strategies activity in which students examine register and politeness.
3. The grid can be used for classes from junior high school to university and adults at almost any level of English language proficiency. Students at lower levels can begin with personal or concrete topics and write in words, phrases, and sentences at home to help them speak with their classmates the next day. For mature students or those at higher levels of proficiency, teachers can give prompts requiring higher order thinking skills on more controversial topics such as international relations, the environment, or science and technology. A few words in each box can function as brief notes for talking with classmates or extemporaneous speaking. Empty boxes help students listen carefully and take notes on what their classmates say.
4. The size and shape of the grid can be adjusted for different classroom settings, forms of technology, and degrees of complexity. Boxes can be enlarged to add more space for writing or reduced to make room for only a few words. The grid can be copied for individual use, drawn on the board for students to copy, or projected onto a screen. The number of columns and rows can be increased or reduced as desired.

5. Finally, by giving a point or two for each completed box in the grid, teachers can use the graphic organizer as a form of informal assessment.

Conclusion

No one knew design better than Steve Jobs did. His genius was integrating simplicity, utility, and elegance in wondrous devices designed to delight and benefit users. He can inspire teachers, too, in our development and production of instructional materials for our students to use. The simple and effective use of tools like graphic organizers can delight our students and help them engage in using English for communicative purposes. Now, if you look closely into the crystal ball in the Appendix, I am sure you too will see clearly what I can see: “For you, in a future lesson, if you try this device, you will have great success with your class!”


About the Author

James W. Porcaro is a professor of English as a foreign language at Toyama University of International Studies in Japan. He also teaches at the university's affiliated high school and is active there in teacher development projects.

Appendix

Example of a Graphic Organizer

Directions: Look into your crystal ball. What do you see in the future? Write a few words to use when you talk to your classmates.

	Life in 5 years [2017]	Life in 20 years [2032]	Life in 50 years [2062]
For me			
In Japan			
In the world			

Listening Power 2

Review by Ryan Lege

Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah

Listening Power 2. David Bohlke and Bruce Rogers. Pearson Longman. 2011. Student book with audio and classroom audio. ISBN 978-0-13-262651-4. \$37.00. Classroom audio CD. ISBN 978-0-13-231543-2. \$45.50 Teacher's pack. ISBN 978-0-13-611426-0. \$12.95

Listening Power 2 is part of a three-part series. The additional members of the series, *Listening Power 1* and *Listening Power 3*, are written for high-beginners and advanced learners respectively.

Listening Power 2 is targeted towards intermediate level learners seeking to establish a foundation of good listening skills necessary for classroom, social, and workplace interaction. The content and the way in which it is presented are oriented towards older teen and adult learners. The text contains a great deal of material selected from a variety of topic areas suitable for learners in this age range. *Listening Power 2* could be used in both EFL and ESL contexts. The text is designed for use in a classroom setting wherein both a teacher and peers are available for collaborative learning. Nonetheless, students could easily use the included CD and work through exercises at their own pace. The authors intend for the book to be completed over the course of a semester.

Listening Power 2 eschews a traditional linear format, instead dividing listening into four different units: Language Focus, Comprehension Focus, Note Taking Skills, and Listening for Pleasure. The authors recommend that all four units be used concurrently when working through the text. Each unit of the text successfully introduces a variety of tasks while staying focused on the goals of the unit. Speaking, reading, writing, and grammar are integrated into each unit. *Listening Power 2* follows principles of good lesson design in that exercises move from controlled to more loosely structured practice.

The audio CDs are organized and easy to use due to an informational booklet that includes the title, page number, and a brief description of each CD track. The audio on the CDs is very clear and well narrated. There are multiple male and female voice actors who articulate the script very well. Though the audio is not authentic, each listening is carefully designed with a specific goal in mind, an achievement difficult with authentic audio.

Visually the text is well designed and content is easy to follow. Its non-linear format allows teachers and administrators to organize syllabi and curriculum in a manner tailored to the needs of their students and program.

About the Author

Ryan Lege (BA TESOL, TESOL Certificate) has diverse experience within the field of TESOL. He has taught ESL and EFL in a range of places over the last four years, including Hawaii, Japan, Cambodia, and, currently, Utah. He is completing an MA in TESOL at Brigham Young University. His interests include teaching pronunciation, speaking, and reading.

Adult Language Learners: Context and Innovation

Review by Piret Luik

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Adult Language Learners: Context and Innovation. Ann F. V. Smith and Gregory Strong, volume editors. TESOL Classroom Practice Series. 2009. ISBN 9781931185615. 178 pp. Member: \$29.95. Nonmember: \$39.95.

Adult Language Learners: Context and Innovation is part of the TESOL Classroom Practice Series and thereby very practically oriented. The book focuses on adult language learners and is meant to serve as a guide mainly for ESL/EFL teachers but also for those becoming teachers or who are volunteering in the field.

The book examines three main areas: teacher development, extending learner autonomy, and innovations within the course. Each section focuses on recent developments in specific topics.

The book is practice and innovation oriented, making it easy to read and highly useful for those seeking to improve themselves and their teaching practices. Each chapter is written with classroom application in mind, especially focusing on innovation in adult language learning. Also, appendices are added to make the chapter ideas even more useable and testable in readers' teaching contexts.

The chapters are short (around ten pages) and concise. Yet, the authors have included everything necessary to make the writing complete and pleasant to read. Most chapters include tables and figures, thereby making the reading, situation, and solutions even easier to follow. Each chapter has three sections: context; curriculum, tasks, materials; and reflections. The sections are preceded by a short introduction describing the general situation in the chapter specific field. The first section, context, describes a specific situation to offer a clear context for exploring the chapter theme. The next section discusses the curriculum, tasks, and materials involved to try to solve the context situation. The last part, reflections, serves as a summary which at the same time offers further solutions to the situation discussed in the chapter. The sequencing is logical, and each

section includes enough information to make the application of the innovation as easy as possible.

Adult Language Learners: Context and Innovation is a very helpful book for those looking to improve their teaching practice and to bring innovation into their classrooms. The book is enjoyable and offers examples from ESL, EFL, and ESP contexts. It will certainly help the reader to become familiar with and to utilize, as desired, new successful instructional practices in TESOL.

About the Author

Piret Luik is a second year TESOL MA student at Brigham Young University. She has taught Writing and Structure courses to beginners at BYU's English Language Center. Her interests include curriculum design, and second language acquisition.

