

ETiC

English Teaching in China

A peer-reviewed journal for teaching professionals

Issue 1 • September 2012

Research

- ARS clicker technology
- Podcasts
- L1 in the classroom

Reflections

- Academic and cultural issues facing Chinese students in western higher education
- Encouraging greater participation in class and tutorials

Reviews

- Books
- Websites
- Software



Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
西交利物浦大學

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Welcome to the first issue of English Teaching in China (ETiC), a bi-annual journal for English language teaching professionals in China.

This issue shows what we are aiming to do, which is to create a journal that is both scholarly and practical, by including a mix of short research reports, teaching reflections, reviews and recommendations.

The contributions for this issue were supplied exclusively by tutors from the English Language Centre (ELC) of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in Suzhou, China. However, it is hoped that future contributions will draw upon the experiences of English language teachers from all over China, and beyond. Consequently, submissions of the sort included here are sought for future issues.

If you are interested in submitting an article for consideration, please email it to etic@xjtlu.edu.cn. The contribution criteria and other information can be found on the ETiC website at etic.xjtlu.edu.cn.

ETiC's first issue includes three short research reports on the use of ARS clicker technology, podcasts and L1 in the classroom, and two articles which discuss the kinds of academic and cultural issues which Chinese students face when adapting to a western style of higher education.

We also have articles concerning how to encourage Chinese students to participate in class and tutorials, recommendations for websites and software, and a book review.

Lastly, a special word of thanks to the many reviewers, copy-editors and authors, and to the editorial and design teams, whose hard work made this journal possible. In addition, we would also like to thank Steve Jeaco, Director of the ELC, and the Senior Management of the Centre for Academic Affairs of XJTLU, for their support and guidance.



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ARS Clicker Technology: A Useful Tool for Language Teaching with Large Groups?

By Eoin Jordan; Samuel Crofts

This article reports on the trial of ARS (Audience Response System) clicker technology in language lectures at an English-medium international university in China. Seven lecturers used an ARS with a group of 258 students over a semester-long series of English language lectures. At the end of the course, questionnaire feedback was collected from both lecturers and students to discover: (i) whether they felt that this technology had enhanced learning in the lectures, and (ii) what problems they had experienced when using the ARS. The results suggested that both lecturers and students felt the ARS did enhance learning, by both increasing interest in the lecture materials and improving understanding of content. Problems reported were limited to the performance of the equipment used during the trial. These findings suggest that ARS technology may be a useful tool for language teaching with large student groups.

Introduction

Facilitating a mixture of traditional lecturing techniques and the kind of technology more at home on TV game shows, *clicker*-based Audience Response Systems (ARS) are currently attracting considerable attention among educators across the world (Cardoso, 2010). In a classroom environment, ARS clickers enable students to instantly send information to a central computer, which can then display the responses on a screen. In several disciplines at university level, ARS technology has been shown to improve student performance in tackling in-class concept questions (Smith et al., 2009), as well as classroom engagement (Duncan, 2006). For language educators, however, a comparative lack of research makes it difficult to gauge the potential usefulness (as well as potential uses) of this kind of technology. With this in mind, we present here a short report of an empirical study on the effectiveness of an ARS in a series of language lectures at an English-medium university in China. The first section below provides a brief overview of ARS technology in education, as well as details about the context for this study and our research questions. This is followed by a description of our methodology, results and conclusions.

ARS technology in language education

Clickers can be used for a range of classroom purposes, including in-class surveys, multiple-choice questions, the recording of attendance, as well as checking understanding. In the language classroom, research into the application of ARS technology has been limited so far, with Cardoso (2010) suggesting this lack of research may be due to the smaller class sizes typically involved in language education.

Among the few studies specifically connecting ARS technology to language learning, Cutrim Schmid (2008) suggests that the engaging nature of clickers can increase interactivity, especially in larger classrooms where interactions between students and teachers are logistically difficult. Further to this, a study conducted with advanced English learners in a Brazilian language school leads Cardoso (2010) to suggest that clickers can increase both motivation and in-class participation. The opinions of language teachers are almost absent from research in this area; however, one study does report positive responses from primary school ESL teachers in Nigeria, who particularly praised the ability of clickers to trigger effective communication and improve participation among students (Agbatogun, 2011).

Given the relative lack of previous research focused particularly on language education, it

is also useful to briefly explore the reported effects of clickers in other educational disciplines. Caldwell (2007) states that clickers, by their very nature, encourage participation as all students are asked to respond to all questions (as opposed to, for example, the comparatively small numbers that respond when teachers ask students to raise their hands). By simultaneously gaining feedback from large groups, clickers can also help to guard against the dominance of a vocal minority, who may give the impression of understanding a particular topic, when in fact the silent majority does not understand at all (Simpson & Oliver, 2007). Alongside these advantages, Caldwell (2007) suggests that the feedback provided by clickers can help to reveal student misunderstandings that lecturers may otherwise be oblivious to. Other benefits mentioned in the literature include their potential to promote self-assessment among learners (Hoekstra, 2008) and their ability to break up a lecture and increase student attention (Caldwell, 2007).

Although previous research into the educational uses of clicker technology is generally positive, both Caldwell (2007) and Cardoso (2010) highlight difficulties in evaluating the effects of clickers in educational contexts as a result of the “Hawthorne Effect”; this is when participants improve their performance simply because they are being observed. Other researchers caution against attributing the positive effects observed after the introduction of any classroom technology to that technology alone, suggesting that any effects may also be the result of the improved learning environment that is created to allow the technology to work, not necessarily because of the technology itself (Bruff, 2009; Clark, 1983).

ARS Usage in the English Language Centre (ELC) at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)

As a joint venture institution set up by Xi’an Jiaotong University (China) and the University of Liverpool (UK), XJTLU is part of an emerging English language sector within tertiary education in China. The university runs a four-year program almost exclusively in English, with students offered the chance to study during years three and four of their degree at the University of Liverpool. In order to move students

closer to the level of English ability required by UK higher education, the first year of an XJTLU degree consists of a foundation course run by the ELC. This course provides an intensive learning experience for students, and covers a number of aspects of UK higher education that differ significantly from those provided by Chinese institutions. Aside from English tuition, the XJTLU foundation year also introduces students to structural elements of the UK system, such as lectures, seminars and tutorials (<http://www.xjtlu.edu.cn>).

In the summer of 2011, an interdepartmental working group was formed at XJTLU to investigate the effectiveness of using an ARS in lectures at the university. Initially, the trial of this technology was carried out in two departments, Civil Engineering and the ELC; however, as the focus of this article is on language learning, only the trial conducted in the ELC will be described in this report. Given the large number of enrollees, Year 1 Semester 1 language lectures were selected as the most appropriate ELC course for the trial. These lectures are run to familiarise students with the lecture mode of delivery, and to provide them with practice in note-taking and listening. With over 250 enrollees on the course, interaction between students and tutors in lectures is limited as a result of student numbers.

A further challenge faced by tutors delivering ELC language lectures is their focus on topics that do not usually arouse a high level of interest among students, such as sentence structure or punctuation. Sustaining students’ attention when covering such topics can be challenging and, when considered in conjunction with the limited opportunities for interaction between students and tutors, it is easy to see the difficulty of trying to provide engaging language tuition in this format. Given this context, we hoped that the use of an ARS might help to stimulate student interest and interaction in the lectures.

Research questions

Our study was driven by two basic research questions:

RQ1: To what extent did students and lecturers perceive ARS technology to enhance learning, through increased interest and improved understanding in ELC lectures?

RQ2: What problems did teachers and students encounter when using ARS technology in ELC lectures?

Data collection methods, a discussion of important results, and our conclusions about the potential of ARS technology in language learning are presented below.

Methodology

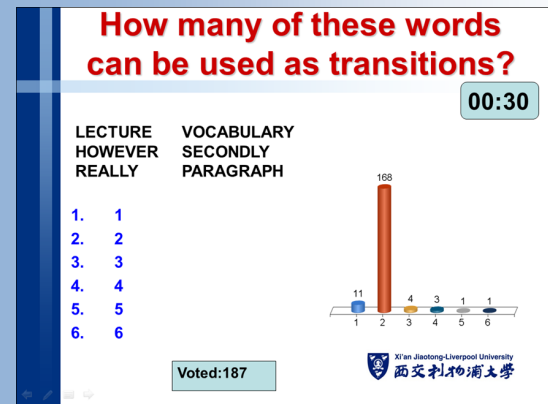
At the start of the 2011-12 Semester 1 ELC language lecture course, 258 Year 1 students were selected to pilot the clicker technology. These students, alongside the seven tutors responsible for delivering eight lectures using the ARS, made up the sample for the study. Each student was provided with one Sunvote (<http://www.sunvote.com.cn>) ARS clicker and was instructed to bring it to lectures for the duration of the research period. Lecturers used Sunvote software to embed clicker-compatible questions into existing PowerPoint lecture presentations. An example of a clicker-compatible question on a PowerPoint slide is shown in Figure 1. In the lectures, tutors informed students that they would be using their clickers for given sections of each session, during which they would be shown questions and asked to select answers by pushing buttons.

Following their ARS lectures, the seven ELC tutors involved in this research were sent a five-part open-ended feedback questionnaire¹, designed by a member of the Civil Engineering Department (see Appendix A). After all eight ARS lectures were completed, student feedback was collected via an online survey, which was designed by the researchers to elicit opinions on the usefulness and performance of the clickers (see Appendix B).

Results and discussion

This section is divided into two parts, looking first at the responses of students, and second at those of tutors, with regard to the two research questions.

Figure 1. A Clicker-Compatible Question on a PowerPoint Slide



Student Responses

Enhancement of learning. From the 258 students asked to participate in the study, 118 responses were collected. Although this response rate appears low, it should be noted that attendance at the lectures during the trial (recorded via clicker usage) was usually between 150 and 200 students. Feedback was generally very positive, similar to results obtained by Cardoso (2010), with negative responses being confined mainly to the performance of the equipment used. The results from two important questionnaire items are presented here to highlight two key areas in which students felt that the ARS enhanced their learning experience.

As Figure 2 demonstrates, students' overall enjoyment of lectures appeared to be improved by the use of ARS clickers. Additionally, Figure 3 suggests that students generally felt the system was useful for learning. Both of these results display positive reactions from students to the use of the clicker system, and reflect a positive overall response across all items (see Appendix B for a more complete table of relevant results).

Problems with ARS technology in lectures. In terms of problems, we initially suspected that the clickers may prove distracting or overly time-consuming, but such concerns were not

¹The tutor questionnaire used in this study was designed by Professor Steven Millard from the Civil Engineering Department at XJTLU.

Figure 2. "Lectures with Clickers Were More Interesting Than the Ones Without Clickers."

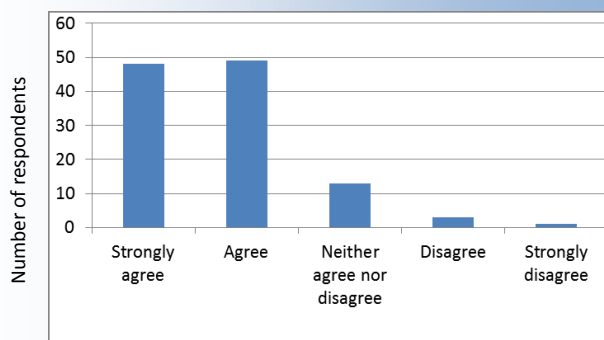


Figure 3. "The Clickers Gave Me Useful Feedback that Helped Me to Learn in Lectures."

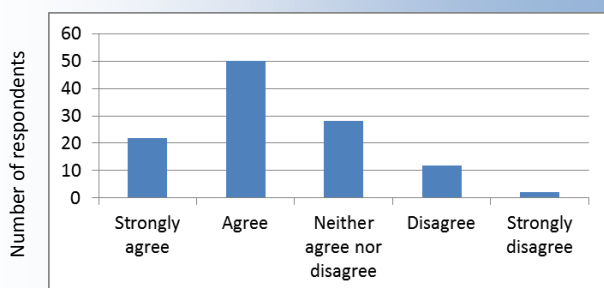


Figure 4. "The Clickers Distracted Me from Important Content in Lectures."

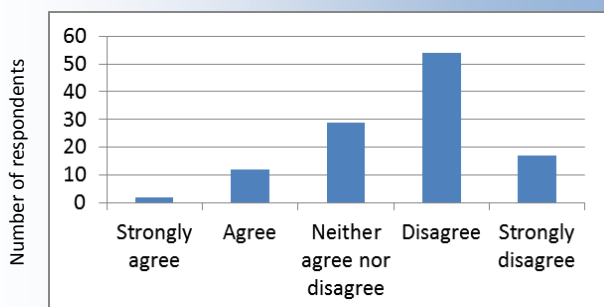
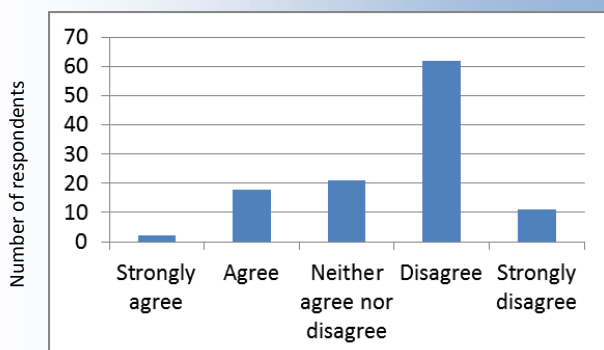


Figure 5. "Using the Clickers Took Up Too Much Time in Lectures."



reflected in the data collected from students, as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5. However, student responses to an open-ended item in the questionnaire provided some interesting contrasts with the generally positive quantitative data. Most striking among these responses was dissatisfaction with the performance of the equipment itself. Of the 49 respondents that chose to answer the final open question, 34 mentioned difficulties with their devices working correctly.

Tutor responses

Enhancement of learning. In general, tutors were positive about the clickers, feeling that they increased interactivity and made lectures more engaging and interesting for students. This was a similar result to that obtained by Agbatogun (2011) for primary school ESL teachers. Each of the seven tutors reported that students displayed above-average levels of engagement in lectures, with one tutor speculating that this could be the result of the instant and visual feedback that students receive. The same tutor also reported that this feedback encouraged students to ask questions.

The second significant finding, explicitly reported by over half of the tutors, was the potential of this technology to highlight areas requiring reinforcement for students, allowing a more reactive style of teaching.

As one tutor explained:

I used real time data to direct my time to elaborating on things which appeared to be less understood by the class. In a situation where you rely on questions from students, such interaction is usually dominated by students with the confidence to ask a question.

This comment, reflecting our earlier suggestion that hesitancy from naturally shy students may cause their opinions and questions to be lost, displays a particularly strong feature of clicker technology. The anonymous nature of clicker technology may, it seems, encourage the participation of quieter students (although it should be noted that this may not lead to an increase in oral participation in class).

Problems with ARS technology in lectures. Problems reported by teachers were limited to technical issues, often relating to the performance of the software used. One tutor in particular also had a number of difficulties with malfunctioning equipment; however, despite these difficulties, this tutor still appeared to regard the ARS as having considerable educational potential: "With fully-functioning (and easy-to-use) software/hardware, and perhaps a demonstration of the software's full range, this could be an effective, additional learning/teaching tool."

Conclusion

We began this report by considering whether ARS technology had the potential to improve the language learning experience of university-level students. After undertaking an eight-week research project, we believe that there is considerable potential for this technology to enhance language teaching with large groups. Overall, students reported an enjoyable experience and enhanced learning. Tutors also reported their experience in complimentary terms, praising the ARS for increasing student interest and focus in lectures, as well as for its ability to provide feedback on students' level of understanding. On the other hand, responses from both tutors and students highlighted significant problems with the performance of the equipment used in the trial, and it is clear that such issues would need to be addressed before any larger scale employment of an ARS.

Although the results of this study suggest that ARS technology has great potential to enliven language teaching with large groups of students, caution must be exercised in generalizing these results. Firstly, it could be argued that the duration of the project was not sufficient to allow the novelty of using such technology to ebb (Clark, 1983). Secondly, with the research confined to students from a single subject major, there are limitations to the extent to which results can be generalised to students from other academic backgrounds. In addition, the seven tutors involved in this project responded to a call for volunteers, so they were likely to be generally enthusiastic about using new technology in education. This may not be representative of the stance of the wider teaching population, either at our institution or elsewhere. Finally, the low response rate for the student questionnaire may mean that results were not repre-

sentative of the opinions of all lecture participants. With these issues in mind, further research over a longer time period and with more students from a wider range of cultural backgrounds is recommended. Future studies should also consider using some form of incentive to encourage participants to respond to questionnaires, in order to provide a higher response rate.

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Appendix A: Tutor Questionnaire

Name	
Department	
Module	
Preparation of questions	
Ease of preparation	
Flexibility of graphics	
Flexibility of question type	
Other comments	
Set up in lecture room	
Ease of setup	
Student login	
Other comments	
Use in lecture room	
Ease of delivery	
Student response	
Ease of feedback	
Other comments	
Saving/retrieving data	
Ease of use	
Data handling	
Other comments	
Enhancement of student learning	
Student engagement	
Lecturer-student interaction	
Lecturer modification of pace or content from clicker feedback	
Enhancement of student performance	
Other comments	
Overall	
Satisfaction	
Negative comments	
Other comments	
Should we procure?	

Appendix B: Student Questionnaire Results (Multiple-Choice Items Relevant to Teaching Only)

118 responses (out of a total of 258 students)							
<i>*Numbers of responses for options on each item are indicated below. The most common response for each item is highlighted in bold.</i>							
How many lectures in total did you attend that used the clickers?	A: None	B: 1-5 lectures	C: 6-10 lectures	D: 11-15 lectures	E: 16+ lectures		
	1	5	74	30	8		
Students were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:							
I enjoyed using the clickers in lectures.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	33	58	15	7	1		
Lectures with clickers were more interesting than the ones without clickers.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	48	49	13	3	1		
The clickers gave me useful feedback that helped me to learn in lectures.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	22	50	28	12	2		
I have changed my mind about an answer after seeing other students' clicker responses.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	6	27	37	34	10		
Using the clickers took up too much time in lectures.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	2	18	21	62	11		
The clickers distracted me from important content in lectures.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	2	12	29	54	17		
The clickers were easy to use.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	37	39	17	16	5		
My clicker worked well.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	17	46	19	29	3		
I would like to use clickers in lectures or classes again in future.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	57	41	10	6	0		
I would be happy for clickers to be used to check my attendance at lectures.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	31	43	22	12	6		
I would be happy for my clicker response scores to be used as part of assessment in a module.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
	17	33	30	24	10		
Students were asked how useful the following activities were:							
Signing in at the start of lectures.	Very useful	Useful	No opinion either way	Not useful	Not at all useful		
	20	46	23	21	2		
Multiple choice questions where you had to choose one answer.	Very useful	Useful	No opinion either way	Not useful	Not at all useful		
	23	66	15	6	0		
Multiple choice questions where you had to choose more than one answer.	Very useful	Useful	No opinion either way	Not useful	Not at all useful		
	27	64	17	3	0		
Roughly how many clicker questions do you think there should be in each lecture?	A: None	B: 1-2	C: 3-4	D: 5-6	E: 7-8	F: 9-10	G: More than 10
	0	1	7	27	43	20	14

To Use or Not to Use L1: That is the Question

By Kristin Reimer

A significant topic of discussion in the ESL field today is the use of students' native language in the English language classroom. Much debate exists over when and how students' L1 should be used in the L2 classroom. Based on this topic, a survey was distributed to 109 students and 28 teachers at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University to discover their perceptions on the use of Chinese in the English language classroom. Results revealed that most students and teachers tend to support using English as much as possible in class; however, students seem to perceive the use of Chinese to be more beneficial for certain types of courses and learning than teachers.

Introduction

With the growth of English as a global language and an increase in the number of people studying English worldwide, there has been much debate centered on the issue of how students' native language(s) (L1) and the target language (L2) should be used in the language learning classroom. Many educators tend to support one of two stances regarding L1 use when teaching English: either English is the only language used in the classroom, or English and the students' L1 can both be used. Advocates of a policy of using as much English as possible in the classroom point to the benefits of giving students an authentic environment where they must use the L2 to communicate meaning outside of assigned tasks and activities (Meij & Zhao, 2010). In certain contexts, students may not need to speak the L2 outside of class, such as in English as a foreign language situations and thus, the classroom is the only place students can fully immerse themselves in the L2. Furthermore, second language acquisition researchers, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) point out that putting students in an English-only classroom will prepare them better for unpredictable uses of the language by both teacher and classmates, which is a more accurate reflection of how they will need to interact

with the L2 in real life (as cited in Meij & Zhao, 2010, p. 397).

On the other hand, a bilingual classroom, where both the L2 and students' L1 are used, can create just as conducive an environment for language learning as the English-only classroom. In the bilingual classroom, teachers can show students relationships between their L1 and the L2 and help them to view different languages as more interconnected than separate, and thus facilitate better language learning (Cook, 2001, as cited in Meij & Zhao, 2010, p. 397). At the same time, more meaningful communication can happen in the bilingual classroom as certain ideas can better be expressed in one language versus the other (Butzkamm, 2003, as cited in Meij & Zhao, 2010, p. 397). Lastly, having a classroom where students are allowed to use their L1 can reduce anxiety and fear, thus lowering the affective filters that can sometimes hinder second language acquisition.

After reviewing the above literature, it was determined that a study focused on the use of L1 in the L2 (target language) classroom could be of great benefit to the teachers at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU). XJTLU is an international university in Suzhou, China, supported by both University of Liverpool in the UK and Xi'an Jiaotong University in Xi'an, China. Many students spend the first two years of

their degree studies in China and then go to the University of Liverpool in the UK for the last two years. In the Year 1 program at XJTLU, students are required to take 10 hours of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes a week, which are delivered by teachers in the university's English Language Center (ELC). These classes are divided into two sections, each taught by a different teacher: one section focuses on reading and writing, which is referred to as EAP class and the other focuses on speaking and listening, which is referred to as Skills class. In Year 2, students take four hours of English classes which are called EAP and integrate all four language skills. A majority of XJTLU students speak Chinese as their first language, so this study specifically looks at the use of Chinese in the English classroom. The specific aim of this research study was to explore students' and teachers' general perceptions of Chinese use in ELC classes in order to see if there were any common patterns of thinking about the topic of L1 (Chinese) use in the L2 (English) classroom. It is hypothesized that most teachers will support a view of using less L1 in the L2 classroom when teaching and that students' will have strong expectations that teachers should not use Chinese during English classes.

Methodology

For this study, the sample consisted of 109 Year 1 students at XJTLU and 28 teachers in the English Language Center of XJTLU. Of the 109 Year 1 students, all were native speakers of Chinese and had around an intermediate level of English. Of the 28 teachers, 20 taught Year 1 EAP and Skills classes and 8 taught Year 2 EAP classes.

The teachers were a mix of non-native and native speakers of Chinese.

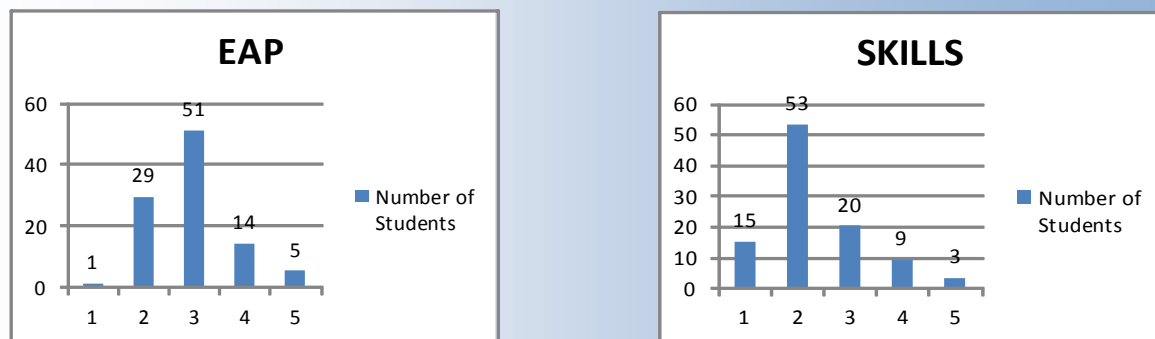
The research tools used in this study were two questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students, as they could be distributed quickly and anonymously and easily analyzed to find students' and teachers' perceptions. The student questionnaire was given to six different Year 1 ELC teachers and distributed in either their EAP or Skills classes. The teacher questionnaire was designed using the website Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) and the link to the questionnaire was then made available to all ELC teachers through an online forum. Any interested teachers in the ELC could complete the survey and responses to the survey were collected over a one month period. Each questionnaire consisted of five questions, which included multiple choice and open-ended questions about the frequency of using Chinese in English classes, reasons for using Chinese, and lastly, opinions on whether the use of Chinese by teachers was useful in class. The teacher questionnaire also included a question asking about techniques used to encourage more English use in the classroom.

After all the questionnaires were collected, the data was collated and analyzed for significant findings, which will be discussed in detail below (see Appendix A for questionnaires).

Results and analysis

Generally, students felt they did not use Chinese very often in their English classes. As seen in Figure 1 below, most students thought their use of Chinese during class was in the range of 1 to 3 on a 5 point scale, with 1 representing never

Figure 1. Students' Perceived Frequency of Chinese Use in EAP and Skills Classes (On a Scale of 1-5, with 1 Being Never and 5 Being Always)



and 5 representing always. An interesting point to highlight, though, is the difference students see between EAP (reading and writing) and Skills (listening and speaking) classes for both themselves and teachers speaking Chinese. In reference to their own perceived use of Chinese, 51 students chose the level 3 on the 5 point scale for EAP class as compared to only 20 students for Skills classes, whereas 53 chose 2 on the 5 point scale for Skills class as opposed to 29 for EAP. Furthermore, a total of 19 students chose above 3 for EAP class while only 12 chose the same for Skills class.

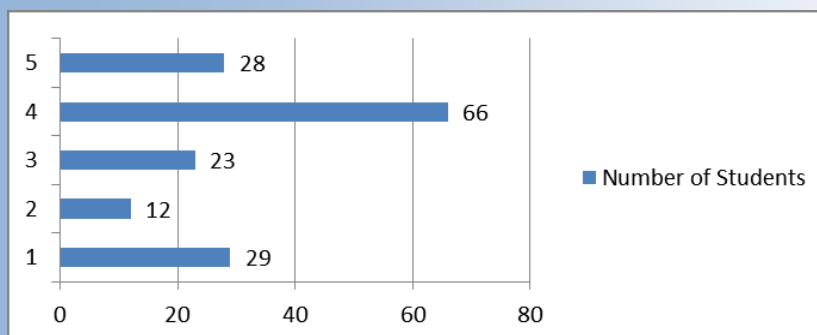
This same distinction between the two types of courses was also seen in students' answers to the last two questions of the survey, which asked students, "Do you think it is helpful for your EAP/Skills tutor to use Chinese in class? Why/why not?" The data revealed that 81% of students thought teachers using Chinese was not helpful in Skills class, while only 52% felt the same way with EAP class. For the open-ended part of these two questions, responses were categorized into similar types and it was found some students felt Chinese was useful in EAP classes to help them understand better (17 responses), for teachers to explain new vocabulary (13 responses) and key concepts (6 responses), whereas a smaller number of students gave the same responses for Skills class (5 responses for understanding better and 4 for vocabulary; see Appendix B for categorization of responses). Moreover, while many students thought that teachers using Chinese in either EAP or Skills class was not helpful, as these classes should have an English environment (32 responses for EAP class, 19 for Skills), less gave improving their speaking and listening skills as a reason for tutors not speaking Chinese in EAP as compared to Skills (8 respondents for EAP class, 23 for

skills). Another 10 students also responded that Skills class should be only for using English while none said the same about EAP class. Based on these results, it seems that students think it is more common and acceptable for Chinese to be spoken in the EAP classes than the Skills classes; however, it is not fully clear as to why they make this distinction.

Perhaps one reason may be the greater emphasis that is placed on new vocabulary in the EAP class than Skills. In question 3 of the student survey, students were asked to indicate their reason for speaking Chinese in class and 66 out of the 109 students chose the option, "I don't understand a vocabulary word" (see Figure 2 below). This was followed by 28 students choosing the option of "I don't understand my tutor's instructions" and 29 students choosing "Other." It is clear that students are switching to Chinese use mostly when they do not understand a new word, which is more likely to happen in an EAP class than Skills as the materials for EAP tend to have far more unfamiliar vocabulary. Furthermore, as stated above, the most common response given by students for why it would be helpful for a tutor to use Chinese in EAP class was to explain new vocabulary. Thus, it could be assumed that students' perceive Chinese use to be more frequent and beneficial in EAP class than Skills class because of the greater focus on new vocabulary.

Another reason for the distinction in students' minds of EAP and Skills classes could also be related to how they view the type of each of these courses. According to the results of a survey about teachers using Chinese in English classes done by Meij and Zhao (2011), students desired teachers to use less Chinese when teaching Oral English classes than reading or writing classes. This seems to fit with the responses stu-

Figure 2. Students' Reasons for Speaking Chinese in Class



5. I don't understand my tutor's instructions
4. I don't understand a vocabulary word
3. I don't understand a key concept
2. I'm bored
1. Other

dents gave to the open-ended questions mentioned above about how Skills class is for improving speaking and listening skills and therefore, it is not beneficial for a tutor to speak Chinese in class. A final reason for this distinction may also be based on whether or not the students' teacher is a native speaker of Chinese. In this questionnaire, students did not indicate whether their English teachers were native speakers of Chinese and so it cannot be clearly seen how much effect the Chinese ability of the teacher had on students' perception of Chinese use in the class.

However, in contrast to students, teachers who responded to the survey did not make this distinction between EAP and Skills class. Generally, most respondents chose level 1 (68%) or 2 (29%) when asked about their use of Chinese in class (see Figure 3 below). Furthermore, of those teachers who taught Year 1 students and spoke Chinese in class, only two teachers believed they used Chinese differently in the two classes, with one teacher indicating he or she spoke more in EAP class and the other indicating more in Skills class. Perhaps a reason for this difference between teachers' and students' views of using Chinese in different types of courses has to do with the

fact that most of the teachers do not perceive themselves as using Chinese as frequently in class as the students do; thus, less Chinese use overall would mean less reason to differentiate between the two courses. Furthermore, the teacher questionnaire did not have a place for respondents to indicate if they were native or non-native speakers of Chinese, so it is unclear what the effect of teacher proficiency level in Chinese could have on teachers' perceptions of their use of Chinese in the classroom.

It is interesting to note that explanation of vocabulary was the main reason given by students and 50% of the teachers who speak Chinese in class for speaking Chinese in the English classroom (see Figure 4 below). Although it is not certain what the Chinese level is of the four teachers, the data does show that compared to the other choices offered, explaining vocabulary is the most common reason for using Chinese. The other responses given for speaking Chinese in class that were not included in the multiple-choice question mostly included environmental factors, such as adding humor to the classroom, and making students feel more relaxed (see Appendix B for complete list of responses)². Based on the results

Figure 3. Teachers' Perceived Frequency of Use of Chinese in Class (On a Scale of 1-5, with 1 Being Never and 5 Being Always)

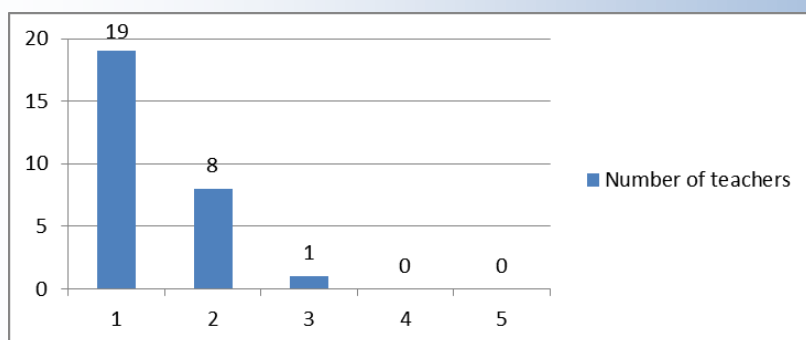
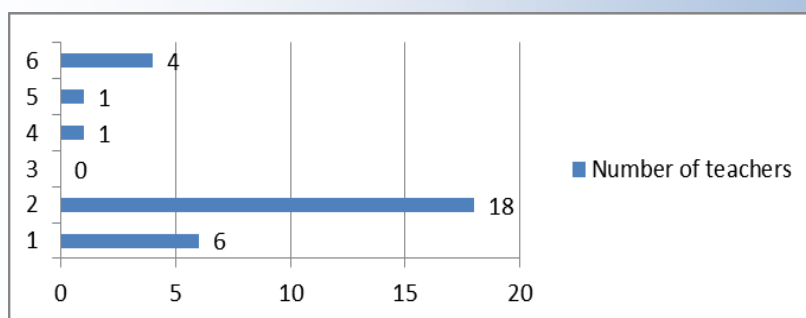


Figure 4. Teachers' Reasons for Speaking Chinese in Class



6. To define new vocabulary
5. To explain a key concept
4. To give instructions
3. To give an evaluation / correction
2. I never speak Chinese in class
1. Other

from the teacher survey, it seems the majority of respondents are not using Chinese in either EAP or Skills class and those that do are using it either to explain vocabulary or to build better rapport with their students.

Conclusion

Based on the research results described above, the frequency of students speaking Chinese in class is higher than teachers according to each groups' perceptions of their Chinese use; however, students believe they speak Chinese less often in Skills classes than in EAP classes while most teachers who do speak Chinese in class do not perceive a difference in the frequency of their use of Chinese in the two courses. Thus, it seems that while Chinese is used in classes in XJTLU, it is mostly used among students and not teachers. Whether teachers are not using Chinese in class because of strong beliefs regarding the use of L1 in the L2 classroom is a matter that needs to be further researched; perhaps more teachers would use Chinese in class if they first of all had the ability to speak Chinese well, and secondly, if they were more familiar with the possible benefits of L2 use in the L1 classroom.

Based on the results of this questionnaire, though, a few recommendations for teachers to consider can be made. Firstly, it is important to note that the main reason students and teachers gave for using Chinese in class was related to vocabulary; moreover, a majority of student respondents who believe that teachers speaking Chinese in class is beneficial also gave the reason of explaining new words, especially in the EAP courses. Thus, teachers could consider ways to use students' native language more when introducing new words in EAP classes. Secondly, some students seem to relate the difference of language skills taught in the two courses of EAP and Skills class to the amount of Chinese that can be used; in their minds, if a course is focused on listening and speaking skills, then it is much more important to use English in class. However, this may not be in line with teachers' expectations of L1 and L2 use in the classroom and so it could be beneficial for teachers to make it clear what their expectations are of L2

use to their students in each course and not assume that students think the same way they do about speaking Chinese in class.

Furthermore, the questionnaire results at XJTLU and previous studies on the topic of L1 use in the L2 classroom also indicate that students are using L1 in class for a variety of reasons (Chen & Hird, 2006; Liang, 2006). It is important for teachers to try to be aware of what these reasons are and not assume that students speak Chinese in class only for one or two particular reasons. It would be beneficial for teachers to do more research in their own classrooms to find out the specific reasons their students use Chinese in class and then create strategies to encourage L2 use that align more with these reasons. For example, teaching students strategies about how to learn and discuss new vocabulary using English could help to increase the level of L2 use in the classroom if teachers feel their students are using too much Chinese in class when talking about new words.

In conclusion, further research needs to be done in order to gain a more in-depth picture of teacher and student attitudes toward L1 use in the L2 classroom and how this may fit into current debate over the topic. The scope of this survey was limited, especially in regard to the number of teachers that responded and the types of questions asked in the questionnaires. Also, analysis needs to be done on whether the Chinese ability level of teachers has any influence on how teachers use Chinese in class and students' feelings towards teachers using Chinese. Finally, it would be insightful to conduct classroom observations in order to see if students' and teachers' perceptions of their Chinese use in class accurately reflect the reality of what takes place in the classroom. Once further research has been completed, more comprehensive recommendations could then be made to enable teachers to create the best environments in their classrooms for English language learning. However, this initial study does provide educators with a glimpse into the minds of students in regard to using Chinese in the classroom and gives an idea of how some teachers at XJTLU approach the issue of L1 use in the L2 classroom.

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Appendix A

Sample of Student Survey (Distributed by paper copy)

1. How often do you speak Chinese in EAP class?
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
2. How often do you speak Chinese in SKILLS class?
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
3. Why do you speak Chinese in EAP/SKILLS classes? Circle all that apply.
 - a. I don't understand my tutor's instructions.
 - b. I don't understand a vocabulary word.
 - c. I don't understand a key concept.
 - d. I'm bored.
 - e. Other:
4. Do you think it is helpful if your EAP tutor speaks Chinese in class? Why/why not?
5. Do you think it is helpful if your SKILLS tutor speaks Chinese in class? Why/why not?

Sample of Teacher Survey (Distributed on www.surveymonkey.com)

1. What year do you currently teach?
 - a. Year 1
 - b. Year 2
2. How often do you speak Chinese in class?
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
3. If you are teaching Year 1, do you tend to speak more Chinese in EAP or SKILLS class?
 - a. I speak more in EAP class.
 - b. I speak more in SKILLS class.
 - c. I speak the same amount in each class.
 - d. I don't speak Chinese at all in class.
4. What are the reasons you speak Chinese in class?
 - a. To define new vocabulary.
 - b. To explain a key concept.
 - c. To give instructions.
 - d. To give correction/evaluation.
 - e. I never speak Chinese in class.
 - f. Other (please specify)
5. What strategies do you use in class to encourage students to use English instead of Chinese?

Appendix B

Categorization of Most Common (5 or more) Responses to Questions 4 and 5 of Student Survey

Chinese is helpful because...

- Help us to understand better (17 from EAP, 5 from Skills)
- Understand some key concept (6 from EAP)
- Understand something difficult (5 from EAP)
- Some vocabulary I don't know (13 from EAP, 4 from Skills)

Chinese is not helpful because...

- Tutor doesn't know Chinese (3 from EAP, 2 from Skills)
- Need to create an English environment (32 from EAP, 19 from Skills)
- Helps to improve our speaking and listening (8 from EAP, 23 from Skills)
- Skills class is for speaking English (10 from Skills)

Responses from Question 4, choice of "Other" on Teacher Survey

- To add humor to the class / to show an understanding of students' native language / to confirm understanding of a new word after I've already attempted to explain it in English
- Concept Checking and Add some relaxation into the class...eg if I am telling an anecdote...
- To put across or emphasize a point students can relate to in their own language humour; maintain cosy atmosphere
- To let students know you understand some and not to speak it
- To lighten the mood - students like to hear a teacher struggle in Chinese!

Podcast in Process: Assessing the Success of a University Podcast as a Non-Compulsory Listening Resource

By Samuel Crofts; Aneta Kaczor

This article reviews the success of an English language podcast as a non-compulsory listening resource at the university level in China. Following a survey suggesting that authentic spoken English resources are beyond the capability of many students at this level, an English language 'talk show' podcast was created and released to students once a week for the 14 weeks of an academic semester. The podcast was hosted by three speakers who tailored the content and level of English to suit students' ability and interests. To assess the popularity of the resource, weekly download numbers were examined alongside 46 emails from listeners. Although the podcast saw an overall decline in popularity over the semester, positive feedback from a number of students suggested that the tailored nature of this type of podcast has considerable potential to attract students to listen in their own time.

Introduction

The word podcast comes from a combination of the word 'broadcast', and Apple's hugely successful iPod (Evans, 2008). Podcasts present series of audio or video files, which users can download and access in their own time, either online or on personal media players. Hammersley (2004) cited the word for the first time in the UK's Guardian newspaper and since then the popularity of podcasting has increased exponentially, with podcasts now covering subjects as diverse as politics, sport, music, comedy and, of course, education.

In terms of language education, podcasting websites have achieved remarkable commercial success. The 'Pod101' series, for example, expanded from a single website offering online Japanese classes in 2005 to accompany the offering of courses in 22 languages and boasting over 100 million downloads by 2012 (JapanesePod101, 2012). Alongside such commercial successes, podcasts have also been created specifically for and by single institutions, with Evans (2008) reporting positive results from a study using podcasts to deliver 'revision lectures' at the University of London. This paper looks at podcasting as a way to deliver a supplementary English resource, offering interesting and relevant material in a context

which, as will be explained later, is characterised by limited access to such material.

Driven in part by Templer's (2008) call to allow students to master simple aspects of the language before asking them to climb the "Everest" of complex English", a weekly English language podcast was established at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in Suzhou, China. The XJTLU Podcast was designed as a resource to be dipped into; it was neither compulsory nor focused on any specific area of language and, therefore, its success cannot be judged by student performance. Instead, it is evaluated by the degree to which students, knowing that no university credit was at stake, used the resource. The success criteria were, in quantitative terms, the numbers of students who accessed the podcast, and in qualitative terms, the reactions of those students to what they heard.

Context

Alongside previous work praising the potential of podcasts in education (Lazzari, 2009), a number of conditions at XJTLU convinced us to establish an English language podcast. XJTLU is marketed as an international institution; the use of English as a teaching medium, strong links with the University of Liverpool (including

Figure 1. “Apart From Study, How Much Time do you Spend on the Internet Listening to English (Online News/Radio/Sports/Commentary)?”









Response	Average	Total
0 to 1 hours per week	 57%	50
1 to 3 hours per week	 24%	21
3 to 6 hours per	 14%	12
More than 6 hours	 5%	4

Figure 2. “When you Watch English Language Movies, Do You Use Subtitles?”

Response	Average	Total
Yes, English subtitles	 34%	30
Yes, Chinese subtitles	 62%	54
No	 1%	1
I don't usually watch movies in English	 2%	2

the option to study there for two years), and a high number of academic staff from outside of China do a good job of maintaining an international atmosphere. However, in terms of creating an English speaking environment *outside* of the classroom, the fact that 98% of the student body is Chinese makes it easy to see how opportunities for students to develop their English skills in a more relaxed environment can be limited.

Though English is used as a method of delivery at the university, a comparative lack of non-Chinese students suggests a gap between the language experience provided in XJTLU classrooms, and the students' ability to access English outside of the classroom. A pilot questionnaire administered via the university's intranet to 87 XJTLU Year 1 students also suggested a divergence between students' own communicative English ability and interests, and the level and subject matter of the majority of authentic English material available online. Fifty-seven percent of respondents reported using the internet to listen to English for less than one hour per week (Figure 1) and 96% of respondents reported the use of subtitles when watching English language movies (Figure 2). As a result, it can be concluded that a large number of students either did not want to access, did not know how to access, or simply could not understand authentic English material enough to enjoy it.

With a measure of assurance that students were not using online English resources as

much as they perhaps could, and some confidence that at least some of them would like to do so more, the XJTLU podcast was designed and created. In the following sections of this article, design considerations of the podcast are discussed and a small scale study conducted to track student interest in the podcast is described. The results of this study are then presented before we conclude with a brief evaluation of the project and a look towards potential future directions for this resource.

Design considerations

Design considerations for this project can be roughly categorised into two sections: delivery considerations and content considerations. In terms of delivery, all material was hosted by the University's online Moodle-based learning environment (referred to hereon by its local name, “ICE”). In order to distance the podcast from other supplementary listening resources, and to avoid presenting it as a type of homework, an external website was created as an ‘access point’ to the podcast. Upon downloading the first episode, students were automatically subscribed to the resource (meaning they had the ability to download further episodes), but could unsubscribe at any point with an email to the hosts.

Episodes were recorded weekly (with a gap in week 7 for reading week) and released online alongside a short email to subscribers alerting them to the fact that a new episode

was live. Each episode was delivered in MP3 format, with listeners given the option of downloading or streaming online. In addition to this, a text transcription of each episode was provided as well as an interactive element in the form of a short comprehension quiz or an online survey related to that week's content. The technology behind delivering each podcast was very simple, with hosts recording each episode directly onto an MP3 player, and then using a simple editing program (<http://www.free-sound-editor.com>) to add sound effects and music to each episode.

In terms of content, the podcast aimed to provide authentic material at a level that was accessible to students. With this in mind, the hosts (as XJTLU tutors) were able to use their experience with XJTLU students to judge the type and level of language to use. The podcast, it was also hoped, would contrast with the types of listening resources already available to students through the university online learning environment, which are designed specifically to improve academic listening and note-taking skills and can be rather dull. The decision was taken to record the podcast in a conversational, talk-show format, with topics for discussion driven by students themselves through email suggestions.

Hosted by a male British native speaker and two female non-native speakers (from Poland and China), the podcast exposed listeners to the different accents, personalities and international experiences of the hosts. Of a similar age and sharing the first language of the target audience, the Chinese host played a particularly important role in the podcast, acting as a positive role-model and person that students could identify with. The importance for learners of having a pronunciation role model from the same first language group as themselves has been highlighted by Jordan (2011), and it is argued that the Chinese host in this podcast fulfilled such a role. That the two other hosts are both graduates of the University of Liverpool was a pleasant coincidence, which allowed them to offer relevant and interesting material to XJTLU students, who are given the opportunity to study abroad in Liverpool.

Each episode of the podcast was essentially unscripted, giving students exposure to the type of mistakes, interruptions and false-starts that typify real life conversations in English. Special care was taken to avoid the kinds of cultural

references that can make authentic English conversations so problematic for L2 speakers, and special attention was also given to talking about subjects that were interesting and relevant to students.

A final consideration in the design of the project was maintaining student interest, as it was predicted that interest in the project could wane over the course of the semester. The voluntary nature of the podcast meant that generating and maintaining interest among students was perhaps the biggest obstacle to a successful project. In an attempt to maintain interest levels, therefore, the hosts gave students a number of ways to interact with the podcast. At the most basic level, an email account was set up for students to suggest future topics; a number of students were also selected for short interviews to be included in the podcast. Alongside this, a series of light-hearted online polls were introduced in various episodes and, finally, a competition was organised by the hosts in which students were asked to submit plans for a 'day out' in Suzhou, with the winners spending a day with the hosts. It was hoped that the hosts would be able to create positive enough impressions for this to be a legitimate source of motivation for students.

The study

Quantitative statistical data showing the frequency and amount of downloads for each episode was obtained from ICE. In addition to this, qualitative data was gathered through the analysis of a number of emails from listeners (all reported anonymously), which gave deeper insights into students' opinions on the podcast as well as future directions for the project.

With over 850 subscribers, over 6500 separate downloads and over 22000 ICE page 'clicks' over the course of the first twelve podcast episodes, use of the podcast far exceeded initial expectations in terms of popularity. In the opening weeks especially, a number of positive emails from students and pleasingly high numbers of downloads showed good levels of enthusiasm among the student body about the project. As predicted, however, the maintenance of such high levels of interest proved difficult and after six weeks, the resource seemed to have a core following with subscription numbers stabilizing. The following sections look at some of the

patterns of student activity and offer some possible explanations.

Results

Quantitative data

This section presents student uptake of the podcast; download numbers recorded by ICE were used to create graphs showing overall download numbers (Figure 3) as well as download numbers for MP3 and text files in the first seven days of each episode being online (Figure 4). As shown in Figure 3, the first episode of the podcast recorded significantly higher levels of activity than subsequent episodes. This is suggested to be the result of the novelty of the resource and students' curiosity about the project. Although the downward trend shown in Figure 3 suggests an overall decline in the popularity of the podcast as the season progressed, it must be remembered that more recent episodes had not been available online for as long as older episodes. The flexibility of the resource, which allows students to access any element of the podcast at any time means that older episodes were

Figure 3. Overall Download Numbers for Each of the 12 Episodes

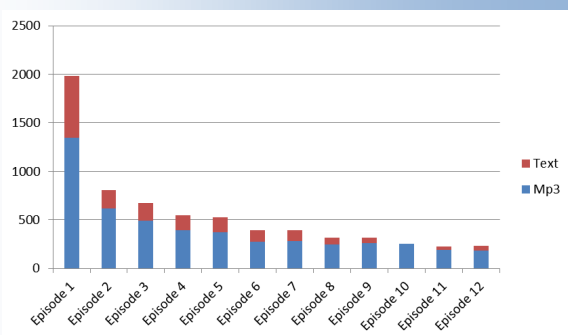
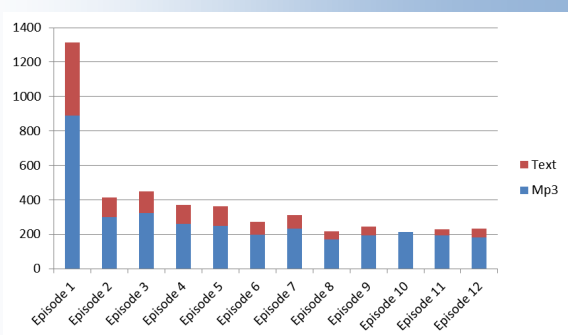


Figure 4. Download Numbers for the First Week of Each Episode



expected to have been accessed more as they had been available online for longer. Figure 4, which shows the download rates for the first week of each episode, provides a more accurate assessment of the popularity of the podcast over time.

Similar to the results shown in Figure 3, Figure 4 shows that the first episode of the podcast was accessed by a significantly higher number of students than subsequent episodes within the first week (1315 downloads of episode 1 compared with 415 in of episode 2). However, instead of an overall downward trend, the results showed robust levels of activity as the project progressed, and it was certainly heartening to see download numbers above 200 per week by the end of the project.

Qualitative data

The podcast email account received 46 emails from students in the first 8 weeks of the project. The overall response of students who emailed was very positive indeed, with a number of emails praising the ability of the hosts to provide English that was easy to understand, yet authentic and entertaining. Furthermore, the relaxed and humorous nature of the podcast also received specific commendation, with words such as 'funny' and 'interesting' appearing frequently. In terms of proposed subjects for discussion, the hosts' love-lives were particularly popular, with other suggestions including the differences between British and American culture, funny stories from the hosts' daily lives in China as well as what it is like to live in a foreign country. The overall impression created by student emails reflects the desire for light hearted and relaxed English, and strongly suggests that students are unable to locate English resources that are both authentic and easy to understand, but also of interest to them.

Conclusion

We began this article by charting the rise of podcasting as a medium to deliver sound files to large numbers of listeners. The use of this medium in education was displayed in the commercial success of language learning podcast sites as well as the reported successes of the use of podcasts in other tertiary institutions. Alongside this, the flexibility of the format convinced us that podcasting had the potential to enhance

the English language experience provided by our university (XJTLU), offering authentic English resources that were both comprehensible and enjoyable.

Having considered the type of resource that ought to be produced, a weekly talk-show based podcast was instituted at XJTLU and a small-scale study assessing the success of the resource in terms of generating and maintaining interest among students was undertaken. Using statistical data gained from the University's Moodle-based learning environment (ICE) alongside qualitative data gathered from emails received from listeners, we were able to report the success of the podcast in terms of audience numbers. With over 6500 downloads in the first 13 weeks of the project, and with a continuous audience throughout the project, we were satisfied with the performance of both the hosts' ability to provide interesting and relevant English, and the ability of the podcast format to provide an efficient and flexible platform for students to access the resource.

Although the data presented here does not reveal how exactly students use the resource, it is suggested that such concerns are relatively unimportant. What is important is that the resource was used and students, it seems, were happy that the podcast was introduced. In terms of creating future seasons of the XJTLU Podcast, the results presented in this paper provide enough evidence to justify recording and releasing subsequent podcasts. The maintenance of student interest and a consistent audience in what is a completely voluntary activity is, however, predicted to be a continuing issue of concern. It is hoped that the increasing bank of episodes will endure as an interesting, relevant and engaging resource for future cohorts of XJTLU students, who can dip into the resource as they wish and access authentic and understandable English which has some real relevance to their own lives.

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Academic Writing and Time Management in a Cultural Context

By Roy Edwards; Yang Xu

Despite having taught on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Business School programmes for many years, the tendency for students from Turkey to China to attempt to complete homework assignments at, or sometimes beyond, the last minute, can still be an exasperating experience. This behaviour can be particularly frustrating in relation to coursework essays. Moreover, regardless of the period of notice provided to some students and the continuous stress on the importance of working steadily through the stages of the writing process, the night before the submission date typically descends into a manic eruption of activity, as students engage in the often forlorn attempt to write directly from the texts in overcrowded computer rooms. Indeed, not only are the critical stages in the writing process leap-frogged, but often not even the minimum time is allowed for basic proofreading.

As a consequence, the work submitted all too frequently reflects a significant level of underachievement for the student, which is often vividly evident in terms of the quality of essay drafts. For example, one Chinese student, frustrated with both his failure to work before the deadline and his subsequent poor grade, expressed his observations in a long email, which is summarised below¹:

The night before an essay deadline is always the same routine. The computer rooms are packed solid with students. The mood is one of sadness and shame that, once again, everything has been left to the last moment, and we feel that we have failed ourselves and our teachers, while we are all a witness to this collective weakness. However, there is a determination to redeem ourselves and save some face by suffering the punishment of writing overnight in order to finish our

work before the deadline. Now, all that matters is that we produce something to present tomorrow to avoid the final shame of having either to report sick, or offer some other weak excuse in the class, in front of a disbelieving teacher and embarrassed fellow students.

Of course, problems with time management and the tendency to procrastinate is something of a universal human characteristic. However, the freedom, temptations and endless attractive distractions readily on offer to university students, establishes a near perfect environment for the development of creative procrastination skills. In this context, Ariely (2008), in his informative and original book, *Predictably Irrational*, introduces a section on student behaviour with the observation that, 'As a university professor, I'm all too familiar with procrastination' (p. 111). Setting the background scene for a classroom study on procrastination at MIT, he continues his comical observation:



At the beginning of every semester my students make heroic promises to themselves – vowing to read their assign-

¹The student gave permission for their comments to be used in this article.

ments on time, submit their papers on time, and in general, stay on top of things. And every semester I've watched as temptation takes them out on a date, over to the student union for a meeting, and off on a ski trip in the mountains – while their workload falls farther and farther behind. In the end, they wind up impressing me, not with their punctuality, but with their creativity – inventing stories, excuses, and family tragedies to explain their tardiness (Ariely, 2008, p. 111).

In order to investigate this issue further, he provided three of his classes with different criteria for submitting the semester essay assignments. One class was afforded the opportunity to decide the submission dates for the three semester essays. The only condition was that, once each student had announced their submission dates, they would be penalised for each day of late submission. A second group was told that there were no fixed dates for submission, but that all three essays had to be presented by the final day of the semester, or penalties would follow for each day of late entry. The third class was presented with three fixed submission dates for the three essays and was formally warned of the penalties for late submission. After the essays were graded at the end of the semester, it was apparent that the class presented with strict fixed submission dates achieved the highest grade average, followed by the class that were allowed to fix their own dates for submission, while the class with the open-ended contract gained the lowest average grades.

While the above example highlights the universal challenges of time management and prevarication when writing essays, students from some cultures, like China, appear to experience increased difficulties with time management for two main reasons. The first issue arises from the clash between polychronic and monochronic time orientation. More specifically, the universities of the English speaking nations are organisations that operate in a strict monochronic framework, while the majority of Asian students are polychronic in terms of time orientation (Hall, 1983).

First, according to Hall (1959), people operating in a monochronic orientation perceive time as a sequence of events that flow into the past and cannot typically be repeated. Moreover, time is experienced as a series of blocks that can be broken down into minutes and hours that must be strictly managed. As a consequence, those operating in this framework live with a clock constantly ticking in their imagination, accompanied by regular alarm calls warning them to prepare now for the next event. The main monochronic characteristics include a tendency to engage in one activity at a time, adhering religiously to plans, placing emphasis on promptness, an ability to concentrate on the current task, while taking time commitments such as appointments, schedules and deadlines seriously. For example, in relation to a typical university programme, while strict deadlines are imposed for assignments, it is assumed that students are able to plan and manage their own time when prioritising work, analysing tasks, researching topics, conducting background reading and completing tasks, with minimal, if any, supervision.

Table 1. Contrasting Time Orientations (Hall, E.T., & Hall, M.R., 1990)

Monochronic People	Polychronic People
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously	Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved only if possible
Are low-context and need information	Are high context and already have information
Are committed to the job	Are committed to people
Adhere religiously to plans	Change plans often and easily
Are concerned about not disturbing others; Follow rules of privacy and consideration	Are more concerned with relations (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
Show great respect for private property, seldom borrow or lend	Borrow and lend things often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Are accustomed to short-term relationships	Have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

In contrast, polychronics perceive time as a spiral, in which events can come around more than once, providing the opportunity to change plans and appointments regularly. Such people tend to undertake several tasks at once, are highly distractible, base promptness on relationships, borrow and lend things regularly and are significantly more people-centred than task-focused. The chart below highlights some of the key differences between monochronic and polychronic time orientation.

As a consequence, time orientation has a significant influence on the ways in which students approach time management during the essay writing process. First, as polychronics consider time commitments as broad objectives to be achieved only if possible, time management schedules for the completion of homework tasks, if they exist at all, are typically perceived only as vague aims, which can be frequently altered without causing undue personal stress. In addition, as polychronics place strong emphasis on outcomes and are galvanised to work only at the approach of final submission deadlines, they adopt a flexible approach to the preceding process such as critical reading, summarising, planning and essay outlining, to the point of being regarded as positively reckless from the monochronic perspective. In addition, even in relation to outcomes, priority is given to assignments that are graded. Consequently, tasks such as essay drafts, being part of the process and ungraded, are not typically regarded as important commitments. Indeed, from the perspective of the polychronic student with ever shifting time commitments, serious effort on the task can be reasonably and comfortably delayed until

the final essay submission deadline looms.

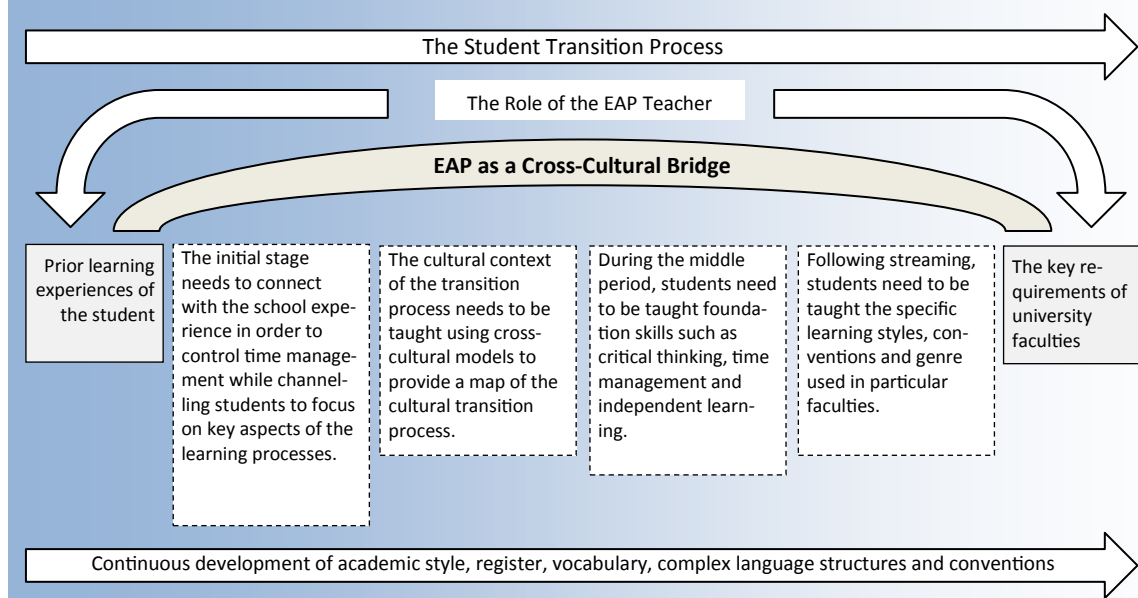
The second reason why some students experience difficulties with time management arises from the extreme contrast between their past experience of education at high school and the learning requirements at university. In order to help examine this issue in more detail, an example of a typical Chinese high school day is shown below, which is based on the experience of one of the authors.

As the example illustrates, there is no space allowed during the school day for the students to develop any independent time management skills. Indeed, in such a teacher-controlled learning environment, there is not even a requirement for the student to manage time, while the opportunity to engage in any form of polychronic behaviour is highly restricted. Moreover, as homework is completed under supervision on the same day it is assigned, students are never exposed to any extended learning process, such as when planning and writing essays.

In contrast, when Chinese students enter international universities, the organisation of the timetable and the learning expectations can appear almost designed to provoke culture shock. From the outset, students are allowed a significant amount of unsupervised space in order to provide opportunities for self-directed learning and personal development, the aim of which is to encourage the student to learn how to learn. However, once outside the classroom, Chinese students often feel lost due to having no prior experience of personal time management, or possessing the skills required for independent learning. For example, one student at XJTLU expressed the frustration of

Table 2. A Typical High School Day for Boarding and Day Students

Boarder Timetable		Day Student Timetable	
5:50-6:00	Wake up	6:00	Wake up
6:30-7:15	Breakfast and morning exercise	6:30	Depart the home
7:15-8:00	Guided morning reviewing class	7:15-8:00	Guided morning reviewing class
8:00-17:00	Classes with two hour lunch and rest	8:00-17:00	Classes with two hour lunch and rest
17:00-19:00	Dinner and sports	18:00	Return home – dinner
19:00-22.30	Homework – supervised and compulsory	19:00-00.00	Start homework under parental supervision
23:00	Lights out	00:00	Go to bed

Figure 1. The EAP Bridging Process

his tutorial group when he announced that the reason why they had not been able to work more on the essays was that there is 'far too much free time' at the international university. As a consequence, Chinese students often comment that, despite the constant pressure to passively memorise for the fiercely competitive national exams, they felt comfortable in the tightly managed school system, in which they received continuous feedback and guidance from teachers.

As a result of the issues discussed above, EAP programmes need to act as a cultural bridge that both restricts the opportunity for students to engage in polychronic behaviour, while teaching practical time management skills that are an essential requirement for successful performance on future faculty courses. While it is important not to be either fixated, or distracted, by particular strategies, certain underlying principles are offered below for debate in relation to the role of EAP programmes as a bridging programme.

- *There is a significant contrast between the domestic high school experience of students and the learning environment at international universities that can result in students initially experiencing culture shock.*
- *The initial stages of the transition process need to connect with the school experience of the students in order to help them manage time while they learn the skills of time management.*
- *As a number of the issues faced by students*

are directly related to cultural factors, cross-cultural models need to be taught to provide students with an explicit map of their cultural journey.

- *Many of the important skills required to function successfully at university, such as time management and independent learning, need to be taught in a cultural context on EAP transition programmes.*
- *Later in the programme, students need to be streamed and taught the specific learning styles, conventions and genres that connect with their particular faculty requirements. Indeed, an English language centre is a service provider to faculty, which makes EAP a distinctly different paradigm from general English. This link completes the bridging process and distinguishes the role of university based EAP programmes from language schools.*
- *EAP programmes need to act as a cultural bridge for the students during the transition process.*

In conclusion, this article has explored some of the common cultural issues relating to time management that can create difficulties for Chinese students when attempting to write academic essays during the initial stages of EAP programmes. In this context, this article has examined ways in which the design of a bridging process needs to take into consideration the school experience of the students during the early stage of the transition process, in order to help students develop effective time

management skills. Furthermore, it is also necessary to initially consider approaches to teaching additional generic foundation skills such as critical thinking, research methods, independent learning, team work and project management, which are essential for the successful completion of the journey across the EAP cultural bridge.

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Helping Chinese High School Students Make the Transition to Writing in a Western Academic Style

By Jinying Ma

Chinese students who wish to study in tertiary education in one of the English speaking countries are expected to make the transition from studying English as a foreign language (EFL) at high school to using English for academic purposes (EAP). However, teachers in western universities often notice recurring language features amongst Chinese students, which clash with their expectations of what constitutes western academic writing conventions. This was highlighted by Li (2002, as cited in Liu, 2010) who compared the writing of native English writers in America with international students from mainland China.

According to Leki (1992), “international students’ linguistic, cultural/attitudinal and academic experiences distinguished them from the English-speaking based writers” (p. 249). This is important because it may lead to differences between the style of writing teachers expect to read and the type of essays international students actually produce. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to introduce the style of writing that Chinese students have learnt through high school study in both Chinese and English language classes, and then suggest how EAP teachers can help them make the transition to a more western style of academic writing.

Writing experiences at Chinese high schools

The format of the College Entrance Exam

The College Entrance Exam is crucial for Chinese students’ choice of universities. As a result, the vast majority of Chinese high school teaching and learning is highly test-oriented, including English writing instruction.

The English section of the College Entrance Exam requires students to write between 100-200 words on information given in Chinese (see Figures 1 & 2).

It is important to notice that the main ideas and the basic organisation and structure for the topic are given. Therefore, students are not required to consider these when constructing their answers. Instead, they can just translate these main ideas and set them out in a 3 paragraph structure as provided. As a result, there is little need for students to learn to structure a piece of writing or critically consider its content.

The use of templates

One common method of English writing instruction at Chinese high schools is the use of

Figure 1. Example of the English Writing Section of a College Entrance Exam (TL100.com, 2010)

07 年高考浙江卷
在英语课堂上，你喜欢你的老师授课时只用英语，还是英语，汉语兼用？某英语杂志社就此话题邀请中学生发表看法。请你围绕 “How do you prefer your English classes to be taught? In English only, or in both English and Chinese?” 这个问题，参考所给要点，选择一种授课形式，写一篇英语短文。

授课形式以： 只用英语	授课形式而： 英语、汉语兼用
优点： 有助于提高听说能力等……	有点： 易于理解等……
缺憾： 不易听懂等……	缺憾： 英语氛围不浓等……
结论： ……	结论： ……

注意： 1. 词数 100~200，短文开头已给出（不计词数）。
2. 参考词汇： atmosphere 氛围
I prefer my English classes to be taught in.....

writing templates (see Figure 3). To prepare the students for the various writing formats to be tested, a variety of templates are designed, including those for classification, process, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and argumentative essays. These are very user-friendly for Chinese students in that they can write an essay by choosing a type of template according to the topic given, and then simply fill in the gaps. However, this leads to students rarely needing to produce grammatically correct complete sentences to express their ideas because, with the templates, students can simply treat writing as a gap-fill and translation exercise.

Length of texts

As seen in Figures 1 and 2, students taking the English section of the College Entrance Exam are only required to write between 100-200 words (see Figure 4). Therefore, the challenges of writing long pieces in English, whether under exam conditions, or for coursework on a computer, are considerable for Chinese students entering western tertiary education.

Writing in Chinese compared to English

Although there are obvious differences for high school students writing in Chinese and in English, there are still many similarities. For example, they are expected to produce 800-1000 words of timed writing in an exam situation. This length is similar to the timed writing requirements of English language universities, such as Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, where the author currently works. In addition, high school students often need to generate a

writing title and a thesis statement based on the given reading materials. As well as this, many common western academic writing features, such as thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting evidence, paragraphing and transitions, are also present in Chinese writing at high schools (TL100.com, 2010).

However, there are also many differences. For example, Chinese writing tasks often include moral or conceptual topics. Examples of College Entrance Exam essay titles from 2012 include: 'the difference between common people and talented people' (Shanghai), 'thinking of life value from a drop of water' (Sichuan province), 'worry and love' (Jiangsu province), and 'concerns about others and society' (Anhui province and Chongqing) (Wenku.baidu.com, 2012). Also, the beauty of the language and the clarity of the structure are highly valued, while originality is less emphasised. Furthermore, while in Chinese writing students are expected to include supporting evidence, this commonly comes in the form of examples from personal experience, and memorised facts about famous people and historical events, rather than from academic sources.

Suggestions

Consider students' prior learning backgrounds

It is important for EAP teachers to understand Chinese students' previous writing training in order to more easily identify students' particular learning needs, predict what problems they may encounter, and design or choose the most appropriate materials or exercises to help them develop. For example, teachers may ask

Figure 2. English Translation of the English Writing Section of a College Entrance Exam (TL100.com, 2010)

College Entrance Exam (2007, Zhejiang province)

Writing task: In your English class, do you prefer your teacher to speak English only, or both English and Chinese? An English magazine club is asking for middle school students' opinions on this. Please write a short English essay on the title of "How do you prefer your English classes to be taught? In English only, or in both English and Chinese?" Main points are listed in the box for your reference.

Teaching language: English only	Teaching language: both English and Chinese
Advantages: helps improve listening and speaking ability...	Advantages: easy to understand ...
Disadvantages: not easy to understand ...	Disadvantages: English atmosphere not strong ...
Conclusion: ...	Conclusion: ...

Note: 1. 100~200 words, the beginning is given (not in the word count)
2. Reference vocabulary: atmosphere (atmosphere in Chinese)

I prefer my English classes to be taught in... _____

Figure 3. Example of Writing Template (TL100.com, 2010)**(1) advantages and disadvantages type framework**

Nowadays, there is a widespread concern over (the issue that) **(essay title)**. In fact, there are both advantages and disadvantages in **(essay topic)**. Generally speaking, it is widely believed there are several positive aspects as follows. Firstly, **(advantage 1)**. And secondly **(advantage 2)**.

Just as a popular saying goes, "every coin has two sides", **(essay topic)** is no exception, and in another word, it still has negative aspects. To begin with, **(disadvantage 1)**. In addition, **(disadvantage 2)**.

To sum up, we should try to bring the advantages of **(essay topic)** into full play, and reduce the disadvantages to the minimum at the same time. In that case, we will definitely make a better use of the **(essay topic)**.

Figure 4. Example of High Scoring College Entrance Exam Writing by a Chinese High School Student (TL100.com, 2010)

I prefer my English classes to be taught in English only. As we all know, a good learning environment is vital if we want to study English well. Classes taught in English provide students with such an environment. When English is the only language used in the classroom, students will have more opportunities to practice listening and speaking. Therefore, they will be able to learn more quickly.

However, there are also some problems with this teaching method. As we haven't mastered enough English words, sometimes we may find it difficult to follow the teacher. Slow learners may even lose interest in English.

Practice makes perfect. To learn English well requires a lot of practice. Therefore, I like my English classes to be taught completely in English.

students to write or discuss individual stories on what was regarded as good writing in high schools, how they learned to produce good writing, and what methods were effective in improving writing, such as analysing model answers, and the use of templates. Such self-reflective activities can facilitate students' learning about EAP writing because those who have undergone the acquisition of writing in their first language and EFL can draw their own inferences for their EAP studies. For example, with a little guidance, students should be more able to identify for themselves which aspects of their previous instruction will act as strengths and which may need to be adapted or abandoned in the new study environment. In this way, by eliciting information about students' previous learning, teachers can help them to apply their existing academic writing skills and techniques when developing their new EAP writing abilities.

Clarify the similarities and differences

It is also valuable if instructors can assist their students in making the transition from an EFL to an EAP context by raising their awareness of the differences and similarities between Chinese high school and western university writing. For example, if students have been encouraged to use a large amount of poetic language in their writings, teachers will need to

point out to them that particular types of content, style and structure are only appropriate in particular situations, and, therefore, using poetic language to demonstrate writing talent is not appropriate in academic writing in most western style universities. In contrast, if students have received training in clear organisation of ideas in L1 writing, teachers can encourage them to transfer those organisational skills to their university writing. Also, it might be beneficial to emphasise that the two writing styles are different, but neither is wrong, and then highlight how students are expected to write.

Provide sample language

It might also be helpful to focus on building the students' English language production ability at university level. One option would be to select and use sample sentences or paragraphs related to the students' writing assignments to allow them to see how language is being used, before they move on to more broad study. It may also be helpful to conduct comparative analyses of writing samples between EFL writers and proficient EAP writers, as this also builds upon students' previous learning experiences of teachers reading out good writing models. This is a good transition strategy, because it is one that students are familiar with.

Guide analysis and critical thinking

Kobayashi and Rinnert (2002) argue that it cannot be assumed students know how to evaluate the information they read or question its accuracy or reliability. Similarly, Wang (2004) noted that Chinese high school students have commonly had very few chances to develop critical thinking skills, and that most of them have not experienced the process of finding information from outside sources and incorporating it into their arguments. They also have not learned how to cite external sources. Based on the fact that Chinese students are used to working from models and sample pieces of writing, a good strategy might be for teachers to use examples of writing which include critical analysis. A similar method could be used to point out to the students the ways of citing research.

Allow students time to change

Chinese students have spent many years immersed in the high school system, and have learnt to be successful in it. To change to a different style of writing, including the use of academic register and the application of critical thinking, takes time and clear guidance in order to enable them to be similarly successful in western tertiary education. However, with time, and by incorporating some of the strategies outlined, EAP teachers can assist Chinese students to make this transition.

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Encouraging Students to Speak in a Chinese EAP Context

By Don Jack; Sarah Butler

Teachers new to EAP teaching in China face a number of challenges. One of the most immediate is encouraging students to speak in class. Teachers coming from academic environments where students readily speak out often find themselves searching for strategies that will help to encourage their students to participate more fully in lessons. This article aims to suggest some useful approaches that can be applied to encourage student participation in speaking activities. It will first outline some of the reasons why students might be reluctant to speak in class before going on to offer some practical ideas.

Why are Chinese students reluctant to speak?

Cao (2011) has pointed out that there are a number of factors that inhibit students' "willingness to communicate" within an L2 context. She lists the following: "... his/her shyness by temperament, or a topical knowledge deficit and linguistic inadequacy, or an influence of his/her cultural background, an uncooperative interlocutor, or a combination of all these factors in the particular classroom culture" (2011, p. 2). Each of these factors may be displayed within a Chinese EAP environment, especially with first-year university students. These students come from a background of teacher-led classes that leave little scope for the type of student interaction often required in Western-style approaches to learning. A consequence of this is that speaking may be the most "rusty" skill for many students entering EAP classes. This in turn may make this type of interaction more stressful than dealing with other skill areas, and so leave students less willing to participate. Students might also feel reluctant to speak because they are afraid of losing *face*, which can be defined as the "deeply held, although subtle feelings of honor, respect, es-

teem and the self in public and private interpersonal relations" (Xiao & Petraki, 2007, p. 7).

Practical suggestions for teachers

Teachers need to become aware of the various factors that might prevent students from speaking in class. It is also worth bearing in mind that students are expected to speak in a variety of different situations (discussions, role-plays, debates, presentations, Q&A) and may be more confident in some situations than others. Becoming attuned to these factors allows teachers to employ strategies to overcome them. The following list of practical ideas for encouraging Chinese students to speak is based on techniques that have been used in the classroom and that have proved successful. The list is meant to be suggestive, rather than exhaustive, and teachers are encouraged to use it as a springboard for the development of other strategies more suited to their particular situation and the particular needs of their students.

In addition to the suggestions outlined here, as students gain more skills, language and confidence, they should become more willing to contribute in class, participate in discussions and volunteer answers.

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Learn and use students' names

Using a student's name begins to establish a personal relationship between teacher and student that goes some way towards breaking through the barrier that often places the teacher at a distance. The teacher should also encourage students to use each other's names for many of the same reasons. In addition to being reluctant to speak to the teacher, many students are often also reluctant to speak to each other. Getting them to know each other is an important initial step and one that is often overlooked.

TIP: The teacher can ask students to nominate the next student to read out an instruction or question. The student could be encouraged to call on someone he or she has not worked with before. This encourages students to learn names and also gain more confidence speaking in front of others.

Rotate students

Following on from the above, it is useful to move students around the class to encourage them to get to know their classmates. This has the double advantage of increasing student confidence, while also providing them with the opportunity of dealing with a variety of approaches to negotiating meaning.

Choose specific students to answer questions

Remembering and using names also allows the teacher to call on students specifically, rather than just pointing at students. It is important not to choose the same student every time for this, but rather teachers should make sure that they ask all the students to offer contributions.

TIP: It is also helpful to check that the student you select to answer a specific question has the correct answer. This can be achieved by effective monitoring. If, however, the student is unable to provide an answer or provides a wrong answer, the teacher should deal with this positively, perhaps by providing scaffolding in order for the student to arrive at the correct answer. Alternatively, the teacher can redirect the question back to the class as a whole.

When appropriate, pick names or teams randomly

When students have prepared presentations or topics for open class discussions, they generally appreciate this random method as it means neither the teacher nor the students have chosen the student to speak.

Prepare for open class discussion by having small group discussions

It is often the case that students are more comfortable speaking in smaller groups than speaking in open class discussions. Having small group discussion/brainstorming sessions allows students to test their ideas and language skills in a less intimidating situation.

Sit with groups during small group discussions

While some teachers may argue that sitting with students may inhibit them too much, positive feedback and scaffolding within small group discussions can strengthen confidence. Teacher presence during small group discussions also contributes to the breaking down of the distance between teacher and student that many Chinese students carry with them from their previous educational experiences.

Use appropriate error correction

It is important to take a sensitive approach to error correction during speaking activities so as not to negatively affect confidence.

TIP: Teachers can instill confidence with positive non-verbal gestures.

Give students repair strategies

This allows them to deal with false starts and breakdowns in communication. Other strategies that may be useful are those that allow students to politely express opinions that are opposite to those held by peers, as Chinese students are generally reluctant to disagree with their peers.

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Empty Office Hours: A Teacher's Reflections on an Unexpected Phenomenon

By Olivia Conner

Throughout my years at university I would attend multiple office hours per session, making sure that my teachers knew my name and were aware of how hard I was working. I was convinced that this connection would give me a personal edge that would ultimately help me gain a better grade. However, many students do not have the same tendencies, but I have to admit that because of this personal experience I had anticipated that my own students would have an equal enthusiasm for interaction as I did, but I was proven wrong. Hence, I wrote this article to discuss the purpose of office hours, to share the ideas I have had and have learned from others, and to inspire teachers to introduce creativity and flexibility into their office hours with the hope that they will subsequently attract more students.

Firstly, it might help to discuss what the purpose of office hours is and why teachers and students continue this relationship outside of class. Although holding office hours is usually mandatory for all teachers, some may think that this time impinges on the already busy schedule and might therefore reduce their enthusiasm. However, this need not be the case because this time is for teachers to get to know their students better and to assist them with various issues or misunderstandings that arise throughout the class, ones that students may not feel comfortable discussing with everyone else. It is also for one-on-one time that some students might crave, although getting them to take the first step into the office can be difficult.

For example, when I began teaching full time at the university level, I set my office

hours for the same time every week. At first, I sat in the office waiting for students to line up outside my door. When it did not happen I reassured myself that when the time for marking came, they would be rushing to my office, fighting each other off for extra help with editing since this is when I often visited my teacher. I even went as far as creating a sign-up sheet to organize their visits, just in case they overlapped. However, I spent my office hours planning lessons instead and when the time for essay assessment came around I did get a few visits, but they were mostly from my best students who needed help the least.

Subsequently, after a little reflection I decided that it was time to take action, so I made some changes the following semester. Also, I was inspired by a few teachers in my department who had had more experience than me on this, teachers who went as far as developing office hour task sheets for their struggling students who were falling behind the given curriculum. I began to think critically about how to make office hours more accessible and attractive for my students, depending on their goals, lifestyles and personalities.

I realized that many students were unaware of why they should attend office hours. For that purpose, I created a list of reasons why they could benefit from visiting my office and went over this on the first day of class. For example, they could discuss the curriculum, tests, assignments, career choices, and even personal matters that were affecting their performance. I included this last point because I noticed that a couple of students visited my office simply because they wanted advice on an issue they

were concerned with that did not exactly involve me or my class.

For instance, I had a student visit to discuss her future career plans and her personal goals. When she left, I was pleased that she had found someone to talk to, even if I could not solve her problems for her. Nevertheless, if students come for advice on matters that are too personal, or if they seem to be emotionally unstable, teachers should make sure they have the contact information to refer that student to the appropriate support department within the institution. We, as teachers, can give students good advice in some personal circumstances but should not try to be professional counselors if we are not trained to do so. I also noticed that the students who came to visit me were often in the top 5% of the class. One student came for editing help because she did not believe that her peers could offer the kind of editing support she needed. To make the most of this student's talents, I decided to connect her to a peer who was at the same level of ability to restore the confidence that her fellow students could be of help to her, and to renew her enthusiasm for the peer review process. Also, it saved me the time I would have spent correcting her reports in my office.

Another good idea I learned from a colleague is that teachers can have a collection of materials on hand to give to students, such as grammar exercises, writing activities, or a list of useful websites. Teachers can suggest that students complete these activities after the meeting, especially when there is an area where students specifically need improvement. Whether the student is not feeling challenged by the material for the class or is struggling to understand concepts, giving students projects to help their specific needs might make them feel like they are taking a step in the right direction towards greater linguistic competence.

Although successful students are more than welcome to visit during office hours, the real question for teachers is how to attract the stu-

dents who are falling behind in the class and how to make sure that those students' academic needs are being addressed within the short time available. I have observed that one of my colleagues gives her students a diagnostic test at the beginning of the semester and then encourages students of her choosing to visit her office for assistance with their time management and language weaknesses, giving them handouts for curricular support and discussing how to better organize their time by asking them to discuss their study habits with her.

This innovative method inspired me to be more proactive with my students and to email those that I felt were struggling or were missing too many classes. I would ask them to come into my office and discuss their absences, or I would work with them on a specific issue that I felt they were falling behind on. This system allowed me to pay more attention to my students' performance and attendance. Simply having a discussion with the students helped me foster a better relationship with them, thereby promoting more communication and understanding between us.



Where and when teachers hold office hours may also affect student participation. Generally, coffee shops are appropriate areas for meetings with students because they add a casual element to the discussion. If teachers work in a cubicle, or share an office, students may feel uncomfortable. They may be intimidated by the atmosphere of the office and might be more inclined to go somewhere they are accustomed to. Personally I would often

meet students in my office and then walk with them to the coffee shop, chatting on the way to calm their nerves.

Finally, encouraging students to visit in groups can be a way for teachers to make the most of the time they have and to promote more visits. If students are shy or fearful that they will have nothing to discuss with teachers, they may be more likely to come if they know other students will be there to assist them. This works well when students are assigned group projects. Having the whole group come as a unit will assist teachers in observing group dynamics and may help them perform better group assessment.

In the end it is up to you how you structure office hours and here are some helpful ideas: give students a reason to visit, offer them materials to take home, invite them to visit, have them come in groups and change the atmosphere. This will encourage students to come and make the most of the time they spend in the office. Overall, office hours should be a time for connection and discussion, and that is why it is important for both teachers and students to participate.



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Doing it Differently: This Time with Cardboard!

Jonathan Savery

In order to enliven what, at the time, seemed a rather routine Year 1 Semester 1 (Y1S1) English for Academic Purposes course for intended Engineering students, I decided to introduce a practical team activity that, it was hoped, would engage students' interest, challenge their ingenuity, build relationships, encourage elementary planning and organizational skills, demand some basic constructional abilities, and inspire the use of English on the basis of students having to communicate with each other out of life-like necessity. This "innovation" was all rather ad hoc on my part: urged on by a mild desperation, rather than pedagogical theory, to do something absorbing. Instinct leading where academic-style reasoning lagged behind, I sensed (as teachers often do) the activity would prove successful. Students had to design and assemble a river craft.



The idea was inspired by previous instances I had experienced where obvious practical need appeared to facilitate language learning; where language materialised out of necessity. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), for instance, a car repair shop I visited far too frequently employed workers from India (mechanical repairs and shop manager), the Philippines (car bodywork), Sri Lankans and Syrians (stores), and Egyptians (front office clerks). The language of communication was

necessarily in English. It was even more so since the customers' common language was English too. The practical need for all to express themselves and to understand each other had to be met. English filled that need. It was the language of the tyre-repair, of the oil-change, of the valve replacement, of the fixing the front wing, and of the account and payment with the customary wrangles and eventual discounts added in.

Such use of English as a lingua franca in the region was not, however, confined to vehicle repairs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians began to journey to Dubai and Abu Dhabi in large numbers. Their purpose was to buy jeans and other western clothes for shipment back to a freshly liberated, Russian market gluttonous for these symbols of emancipation from Soviet drudgery and shapeless trousers. Soon, the Cyrillic alphabet was used to advertise products sold across Pakistani or Yemeni counters, whose jovial and obliging proprietors mastered with startling alacrity the elementary language of overcharging their Muscovite mercantile-class purchasers on their first trip abroad. Deeply impressive, this achievement was driven by immediate practicalities, and quite possibly a taste for the fast buck (or Dirham).

On the strength of these visible instances of language growing to match an obvious requirement, I set my Y1S1 English for Academic Purposes class the "Model Boat Building Project", as it was grandly termed, certain that something useful would come out of it: as indeed it did. In deference to the environmentalism that I felt my students believed in despite their public tendencies to fling litter, the chosen challenge was to design and construct a vessel for removing rubbish from the local Suzhou canals. The emphasis was firstly on "impossible" ingenuity and imagination, brought back to practical reality by what a marine-engineering genius might realistically achieve with a cardboard

box, scissors and a length of twine. The students, organized into small teams, had to allocate tasks, collaborate over the design, plan the work, gather materials, keep a written account of progress, timetable their enterprise, and finally assemble their inventions, all using as much English as they could manage. In short, they had to improvise and think at an active and entirely relevant level. This means “relevant” as an engineering project for aspiring students of that field, and at a language level they could confidently address. English was, as far as reasonable, to be the medium for this: the working language of creativity, discussion, organization, recording, and practical cooperation. It was KSA and Dubai déjà vu all over again in a Suzhou classroom.

English was also the language of presentation and explanation. At the end, each group was obliged to show off their construction, to describe what it was supposed to do, how, and why, and to answer questions as arising. This, in conclusion, each group did with admirable enthusiasm and genuine pride, leaving me – and the University’s newspaper¹ – with the sense that something educationally positive had happened. Students built their boats (twin-hull, single hull, multiple extending arms with pincers, solar panels, conventional engines, bio-fuelled, shallow-draught, and so on), enjoyed doing it, and learned much from it. My instincts had been vindicated.

Moreover, student feedback was deeply encouraging: “When we got this assignment we were really surprised because we have never done anything like it and that was quite a challenge.” “We can sail our imagination like we sail our boat model.” And, “Through this presentation I became more confident about giving a speech in front of people. What’s more, questions from the audience made me think from other angles...”

Implications are several:

- *Students seem to respond well to tasks engaging their natural interests.*
- *Students willingly use language necessary to an interesting, pertinent task or activity; consolidating and practicing the language they know and extending it to meet reasonable fresh demands. As their interest is cap-*

tivated, so their tendency to employ language as required increases.

- *The project incorporated students’ own ideas, thus encouraging ownership and management of it. In this sense it was student centered and “negotiated” in that participants shaped their own activity.*
- *The project promoted inventiveness and a healthy, creative rivalry between groups.*
- *It integrated a range of skills and aptitudes necessary to students’ current and future studies.*
- *Students enjoyed a sense of achievement and success, which motivated them.*
- *The activity was cheap and required almost no extra resources other than waste material and simple craft items.*
- *It confirmed the value of teacher intuition; that innate sense of what is possible and what works.*
- *It showed the benefits of sensible flexibility in instructional approach and the rewards of prudent classroom modifications to a set syllabus. It provides support for the argument that teachers and students, when free to create rather than just to conform, can devise worthwhile and memorable activities that everyone can enjoy and gain from. A next step, then, might be to research into the measurable language outcomes from this kind of creative approach.*



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¹ A description of the activity appeared under the title ‘Learning English is fun!’ in Issue 8 December 2010 of *The Exchange*, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University’s internal newspaper.

Book Review: The Construction of English: Culture, Consumerism and Promotion in the ELT Global Coursebook

By Layla Nichole Shelmerdine; Lee Christian Shelmerdine

This article reviews J. Gray's 2010 book, The Construction of English: Culture, Consumerism and Promotion in the ELT Global Coursebook, published in the UK by Palgrave Macmillan for £49.88.

The Construction of English: Culture, Consumerism and Promotion in the ELT Global Coursebook examines the multifaceted nature of coursebook construction: from grammar and syntax to market forces. Gray argues that coursebooks created for export are “cultural artifacts” where authors, working within the constraints of publishers, imbue them with what are considered marketable values and therefore position them as “language as a commodity”. In this sense, Gray argues that English has been “McDonaldized” in an industry where a standardized product is not appropriate for everyone. This book will be of particular interest to language teachers who select materials and create their own, as well as language teacher educators.

After detailing the premise of the book, as indicated above, Chapter 2 surveys the literature with a focus on reviewing how culture and language are connected and used in the English as a Second Language (ESL) world. Chapter 3 draws heavily on the “circuit of culture” model created by Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Macky, and Negus (1997) to produce a framework for evaluating the four coursebooks which Gray selected, largely based on their high sales figures. Chapters 4 and 5 apply the framework to the coursebooks, exploring a range of issues including how artwork is used to associate English with success, the positive bias Received Pronunciation (RP) often receives and how gender roles and ethnicity have evolved in coursebooks to the point where they may now seem unrealistic, which may elide any polemic issues associated

with them. Chapter 6 attempts to substantiate the issues raised in the coursebook evaluation by analyzing guidelines given to authors, reporting on interviews conducted with publishers, and through theory by reviewing the literature on a number of issues within society such as consumerism and promotional culture. Chapter 7 reports the findings from interviews conducted with a number of ESL teachers to explore any positive or negative facets of coursebooks which are important to them. In Chapter 8, Gray provides a number of recommendations: the need for language teacher education to spend time reviewing the kinds of issues highlighted, the fact that English needs to be “pluralized”, and finally he offers some ideas on how coursebooks could be more localized to fit their context of use.

This book astutely draws attention to coursebook content, beyond the surface language, that teachers are inadvertently disseminating to their students; e.g., the inclusion of more ethnic minorities and women in positions of power glosses over the issues of racism and sexism. Many teachers or publishers highlight the inclusion of more women and minorities as a positive, which it can be, but Gray importantly explicates that this commodifies feminism and multiculturalism. These findings are significant because as Gray notes, these issues and others such as consumerism and artwork are unlikely to be covered by short training courses in the materials design and evaluation sections. Gray places teachers as the primary consumers of coursebooks, therefore when most teachers or

institutions choose a coursebook, pragmatic considerations such as cost, language variety (British, American, etc.), the number of exercises, how interactive it is, and what teaching approach it reflects (e.g., communicative language teaching) are most likely to be germane, while the issues Gray highlights are likely to be overlooked. Furthermore, as a growing number of English language teachers are non-native speakers, the issue of power relations between “English culture”, those cultures on the outer circle (Kachru, 1985), and the culture of those students learning English as a lingua franca is coming more to the forefront of English Language Teaching (ELT) research. Gray’s book argues that the cultural capital transmitted through ESL teaching is no longer an ancillary issue to the language itself.

While the majority of the research was carried out with great care and precision, from creating an evaluative framework to devising the format for interviewing ESL teachers, some aspects of the methodology if conducted differently may have yielded different or more enlightening results. Firstly, the interviews with the publishers were taken from an earlier study and therefore some of the findings from the more recent application of the framework to the coursebooks could not be substantiated with these data. This means that some explanations were sought entirely in the literature and as a result some conclusions are based purely on a theoretical perspective. Secondly, the interviews with the ESL teachers drew entirely from teachers in Barcelona. Although these were experienced teachers, some of whom may have taught in a number of countries, this has the result of drawing heavily from one context. Finally, only general English coursebooks are examined, which excludes possible findings from other genres of ELT.

Many salient issues are raised within global coursebook construction; however, very little empirical data are used to determine what effect, if any, these actually have on student learning. Though little mention is made of this in the book, and obviously not a primary goal of the author, this issue may be the most relevant to language teachers. Furthermore, as indicated by Gray, the views of the students themselves are an important facet of these issues but are not covered in this publication.

Gray’s book illustrates how coursebooks are concomitantly innovating with ELT philosophy, but can be influenced more by market forces than educational paradigms. The socially con-

structed (i.e., market constructed) nature of ELT coursebooks can have an impact on students and teachers within and beyond the classroom. Research into ELT materials and coursebook development, and perceptions thereof, is greatly enhanced by Gray’s book. What is more, Gray gives educators a framework to reflect on and determine what, if any, are the “hidden economic and ideological dimensions” (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992) of a coursebook.

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Insites

Jackie Hemingway & Sarah Butler

This section highlights some useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching and professional development. This time we look at websites with ideas about learning and teaching using technology.

Teacher Training Videos

<http://www.teachertainingvideos.com>

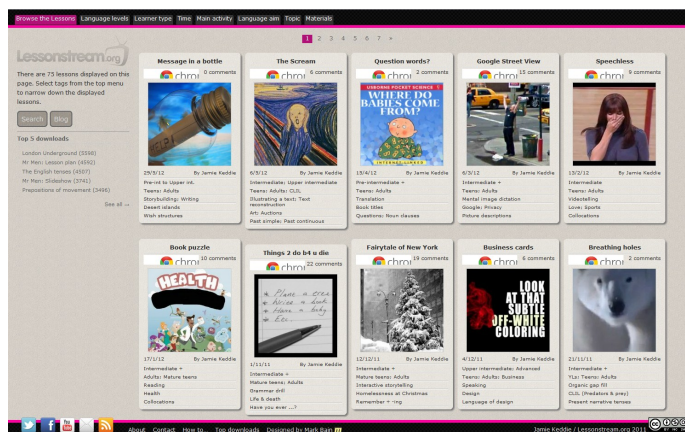
This award-winning website created by Russell Stannard is aimed at helping teachers incorporate technology into the language classroom. Focusing on English Language Teaching (though not exclusively), the author uses video to provide step-by-step guides to using a wide range of websites and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) tools such as podcasts. These videos literally talk users through how to use the websites/tools and offer suggestions for how to use them in the classroom. Both technophobes and the tech-savvy are likely to find new ideas and recommendations on using technology in English Language Teaching. Additional videos recommend websites for students to use for self-study. For those teachers interested in alternatives to written feedback, the site features research into using screen capture software and video for giving feedback to students and provides videos showing examples of how to do this. All the videos and content can be accessed for free and users can subscribe to a free monthly newsletter for updates.



Lessonstream

<http://www.lessonstream.org>

For those looking to use more visual materials in their lessons, this site created by Jamie Keddie, author of *Images in the Resource Books for Teachers* series (OUP), might be a good place to start. Lessonstream offers a variety of lesson plans centred on using visual images and online videos to teach English. The lessons incorporate a wide range of intriguing visual materials including advertisements, business presentations, and music videos. Although none of the lessons are specifically designed for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes, the site does offer materials for a range of learner types including learners of Business English, and many of the lesson plans could be adapted for EAP or at least provide inspiration for using visuals in the classroom. Lesson plans are organized under several categories, including language level, learner type, language aim, and topic. PDF lesson plans are free to access and include relevant images and links to online videos.



Australia Network

<http://australianetwork.com/learningenglish>

The *Learning English* section of the Australia Network website covers a variety of English skills based on programmes broadcast both within Australia and worldwide. University students may find the *Study English* section, which focuses on preparation for the IELTS test, particularly useful as the videos develop general academic language and skills. Transcripts, study notes and activities can be downloaded for further in-depth study. The *Business of English* pages contain detailed notes focusing on key language to help prepare learners for the world of work and this section also provides exercises on developing presentations and taking

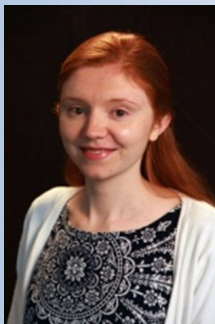
part in discussions. The *English Bites* section is presented in magazine format with topics ranging from national parks to art markets, allowing students to develop listening skills in a less formal, more relaxed way. The videos can either be watched online or downloaded and users can subscribe to podcasts. Overall this is a useful site for both students and teachers and it is easy to navigate from the main menu on the home page.

These websites are useful for developing a teacher's skill set and supplementing teaching. They can also provide students with an element of critical thinking and be used as an alternative to more traditional materials.

Contributions to this regular feature are welcome for future editions. Please contact the authors with your suggestions.

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Software for Students Entering an English-Medium University

Mark Coyle

Three of the main areas that students need help with when they enter an English-medium university are study skills, grammar problems and general English practice. The three software titles reviewed below offer help in each one of these areas.

Study Skills Success (SSS)

Sky Software House

As the name suggests, this software offers students help with their academic study skills and is ideal for intermediate level students entering university.

This programme not only covers the four skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking but also includes sections on critical thinking, research and independent learning. Students are guided through each of these sections by completing different types of exercises, such as gap-fills and quizzes. These exercises do not increase in difficulty, so students can be assigned or choose any topic or level to start with, making it an ideal resource for students to dip in and out of depending on their particular needs.

The writing section may be of particular interest to first year university students as it covers many of the different genres that they are likely to encounter. Teachers may, however, want to check that the format and style guidelines outlined in *Study Skills Success* correspond to those suggested by their particular institution. This would help avoid any unnecessary confusion.

Overall, *Study Skills Success* provides students with a flexible and varied resource that they can use independently to support their transition to university study.



Tense Tester

Sky Software House

Students enter universities in China having spent many years rote-learning grammar rules and vocabulary. So it may be surprising to new tutors coming to China that the level of grammar errors can still remain persistently high.

TenseTester is a software title from a small company, but holds many advantages over other titles. The main advantage is the diagnostic test for new users. This test of 40 questions takes about 10-15 minutes to complete and produces a detailed report.

The report indicates to students the main areas where they have made errors (see the stars next to the grammar points in the screenshot). When learners click on these grammar points they are taken to a page containing explanations and examples of usage. These offer students a clear overview of the grammar point. Examples are also changed with a simple click, which prevents students being confused by language issues.

One potential drawback is the amount of information offered to students when they complete the pre-test. Weaker students may find that they have lots of pages to look through, each with many examples and teaching points.



Road to IELTS (Academic)

Clarity Hong Kong

This software is a topic-based learning programme focused on training for the IELTS exam. However, this training can also be of more general benefit to students preparing to enter, or already in, an English-medium university.

The 12 different topics each have 6 sections, which are Words, Listening, Writing 1 and 2, Reading and Speaking. These subsections do develop in difficulty, but only slightly, so students could skip to topics that are covered in class.

Whilst the topics are related to the IELTS exam, they are also general enough to be relevant to all students, especially those who are planning to go to the UK. It should be noted, however, that whilst the topics are non-specific, there are some ideas that may be slightly dated, especially related to technology or communication.

This title has may have added appeal for students because it is linked to the IELTS test. It also contains a Road to IELTS – General version, with slightly varied tasks for those wishing to emigrate rather than study abroad.

This software is offered online to students before all IELTS tests in China, and can be readily recommended to those who are planning to take an English proficiency test.



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Did you know...

...*etic* is a real word?

The Oxford Dictionaries website defines *etic* (*adj.*) /'ɛtɪk/ as...

studying or describing a particular language or culture in a way that is general, non-structural, and objective in its perspective:

is there a valid cross-cultural etic definition of violence?

Origin:

1950s: abstracted from phonetic

Definition from: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/etic?q=etic>

Chinese Corner

Things you might hear your students say in the classroom...

If you've ever used the 'anyone who speaks Chinese in class has to sing a song' technique in China, you may also have heard one of your students protesting 'bù huì' (不会), usually from one that you've just asked to sing. The term's literal translation is 'no can', and essentially means 'I'm not able to', and it might therefore be worth finding a different form of punishment for the offender.

Another expression you will often hear Chinese students saying is 'nèi gè' (那个), often repeated in quick succession, as in 'nèi gè, nèi gè, nèi gè'. It translates as 'that one'. However, in this context it is more of a filler expression, much as English speakers say 'um', or 'well', and may indicate nerves or confusion in students.

Also in China, teachers are commonly referred to as 'Teacher [family name]', reversed as Chinese names are. So, a teacher called Smith would become 'Smith Lǎo Shī' (老师). Therefore, it is normal to find yourself being referred to as 'Teacher' by Chinese students, and is seen as a sign of respect.

Translations from: <http://www.chinese-dictionary.org>



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