

# ETiC

*English Teaching in China*

*A peer-reviewed journal for teaching professionals*

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Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

西交利物浦大學

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Welcome to Issue 4 of English Teaching in China (ETiC). With two new Editors at the helm, a new Promotions man and an additional number of rigorous peer reviewers and copy editors, this issue continues to uphold the previous Editor's (Paul Meier's) hopes and aspirations for ETiC by attracting more quality submissions and extending its distribution. Indeed, this time we have received a relatively large number of submissions, some of which we have had to withhold for future issues. We believe that the quality of articles continues to be high and of relevance to our readers, but would be delighted to hear any suggestions and other feedback you may have. Equally, more external contributors and peer reviewers are always welcome.

The first section of this issue focusses on oral English, opening with a feature interview with Don Snow, well known for his work on inter-cultural communication and learner-driven Language Learning Projects (LLPs). This is followed by four further contributions under the 'Oral English' banner, and then three articles on wider themes.

The Reviews section contains critiques of a book, some oral websites and a conference report but also a brand new section on upcoming conferences, with Chinese corner rounding off the issue on a lighter note.

The plan for Issue 5 is to have a China English/English as a Lingua Franca theme. Thus, we would especially like to receive submissions in this highly topical area, although other subjects will also be welcome. Please see the call for papers at the end of this issue.

Finally, thank you to each of the thirty-something people involved in producing this issue of ETiC, and thanks as ever to our growing band of readers worldwide.



**Amanda Hilmarsson-Dunn** currently teaches research and communications skills to Doctoral Students at XJTLU. She has a PHD in Sociolinguistics and her main research interests include World Englishes, Academic Writing and Language in Education.

[amanda.hilmarsson@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:amanda.hilmarsson@xjtlu.edu.cn)



**Mark Critchley** (MA in Information Management) has taught languages for thirty years, and was also an adviser to businesses and local government in the UK for over twenty years before joining XJTLU's Language Centre. His key interests are creative writing and English for Business.

[mark.critchley@btinternet.com](mailto:mark.critchley@btinternet.com)

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# Speaking with... Professor Don Snow

## Interview by Mark Critchley

*Don Snow has an MA in English (TESOL) from Michigan State University, and a PhD in East Asian Language and Culture from Indiana University. He has taught language, culture, and linguistics for over two decades in various parts of China, as well as in the United States, and is currently Director of Shantou University's English Language Center. He is the author of several books on language teaching, including *More Than a Native Speaker: An Introduction for Volunteers Teaching English Abroad* (TESOL Publications, revised edition 2006), and *Encounters with Westerners: Improving Skills in English and Intercultural Communication* (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, revised edition forthcoming in 2014).*

You have written at length about the challenges for English language learners in China, especially when trying to develop their speaking skills. What have you found to be the critical success factors that make this work?

To be proficient in a language, just learning in class time is not enough. The students who become really proficient are those who take it on themselves to do more. Of course, there are some casualties along the way however, like one student who decided she would improve her English by reading *Robinson Crusoe*. She had heard it was a great story, but when she tried to read it she found it too hard and too boring. Students need to learn how to choose materials wisely, how to design a project that will build the skills that they need, and especially when learning a language via self-study, they need to learn how to build internal motivation in order to achieve sustainability. Therefore students need to be taught to strategise ... after all, who's making the decisions?

Generally, Chinese students have very little experience in thinking through these decisions; and before coming to university they have had virtually no experience of English for communicative purposes – it has all been test-focused. They have deep-rooted habits and

perceptions as to what language learning is like, and what it is for. For speaking in particular, it's all about having the confidence, and making the choice of whether to engage or not. There is a strong tendency to avoid, but only when they choose to engage can their skills snowball.

You are a great believer in effective learning via small, focused self-study programmes - what you call Language Learning Projects (LLPs). Where should we start with one of these?

Start with a small reading project. It is easy to find materials for this. Next, you could work on a listening project – this should be within that 'sweet zone' where you can understand the material enough without too much trouble, but it still stretches your skills. When it comes to speaking, you could actually talk to yourself. Some find this artificial, or believe they can't improve this way. That's simply not true – it can be effective. However, it is a) harder to sustain, and b) harder to judge one's progress.

Learners shouldn't normally start off on their own. I recommend forming a group with two to three friends. People find it difficult to manage this publicly in China because it is viewed as "showing off" or "unnatural". One good setting, however, is a regular role-play -

same time, same place every week, or more often - or else a discussion group, where members watch a movie and talk about it. To ensure its success you need to find others who will commit to it, but this is a very powerful way of sustaining momentum, since members must read the article, etc. before their meeting.

What would you recommend for someone who is living overseas and trying to develop their spoken skills? What is your experience of this, for example?

For someone on their own in a country trying to learn the language (like I did with Cantonese) it is often still not easy. You have to go and find people who will talk to you ("practice opportunities"). The problem for me was not so much talking to people in baby Cantonese as knowing what they say when they respond. To overcome this barrier I recorded comic radio skits in Cantonese, and listened to them repeatedly for the best part of a year. It was the best thing I ever did. Other successful learners do the same: for example, watching the weekly dialogue programme on CCTV9, or something similar. The key is not just having a plan, but having a plan that you can sustain. In designing self-study programmes, the element of interest is crucial. Students need to pick materials they really like, so that they are drawn to study rather than repelled.



In the university context however, language learning is not fully autonomous. There is the teacher in the background guiding, even though they want the students to take progressive responsibility.

Yes, the teacher might say, "I want you to work on your reading. You choose, but let's talk a little bit about making good choices here" ... or ... "you can choose whether to work on your reading or listening, but it must be a receptive skill". This starts them off on strategising for themselves, giving them the opportunity to start taking some control. Then, by the time they leave the Language Centre (LC), they are able to plan what they need to do in order to develop their English skills even further.

Our LC has a Learning Management System (LMS) called ICE, which is full of self-study resources to help students develop language skills independently. How could such a system be used to support an LLP?

If I am preparing students to undertake an LLP, the LMS is used to introduce the components and to get them to think through the issues. It is especially important to help students learn to choose study goals, given that they would often set themselves very broad goals, working on all the skills at once... and end up seeing little progress in anything. This leads to the sustainability issue: if they see no progress, then why waste the time? So, they should be encouraged to work purely on their reading or on vocabulary building for a while. This helps them see progress, and encourages them to keep going.

Not all LLPs require the use of materials, but when they do, learners should choose something interesting to them - especially when choosing realia instead of something from a textbook. This is particularly relevant for learners who have built a fairly good foundation, but who still have not developed functional skills. They are making a leap into a new and somewhat challenging learning environment, and anything that makes the task a little easier really helps.

Thirdly, when the teacher launches them into doing study on their own, students usually resort to the textbook as a kind of substitute

teacher instead of setting and following their own goals. The trick is to get students to use the textbook as a tool for attaining their own goals, as opposed to a replacement plan.

Another piece of advice is to practise in a way that is as close as possible to what they really want to do. If they want to build their speaking skills, they should practise *talking*; if they want to focus on listening skills, they should listen to lectures, etc. There is often a mismatch between method and goal that needs to be attended to. For example, if their goal is to build extensive listening skills, stopping to look up every new word up in a dictionary is not the best approach, as this reduces the amount of actual listening they do.

The next point is the study plan: to have goals that are realistic. Some say: “I’ll do two hours per evening”, or “I’ll do it in my free time”. Who do you know who ever has free time?

The last thing is planting progress markers. Motivation is sustained where a student can see progress. From intermediate level onwards, progress becomes ever harder to pinpoint. Concrete markers can be: “How many pages can I read in an hour?” Other markers are more subjective: “How comfortable do I feel watching this without subtitles?” So, the study plan and progress markers should therefore feature centrally in the LMS. The subjective or ‘affective’ measures are as important as the concrete measurements. These are the life and death issues. It’s not just a case of *can* I do it, but how comfortable do I feel doing it?

**Let’s talk about intercultural competence now.** I believe that you teach a course at Shantou University on this. What does it mean exactly, and why is so important?

Virtually any time someone uses English in the real world, it will be for intercultural communication. It can be direct, like talking to a Canadian, or indirect like reading a book from another time and culture (back to *Robinson Crusoe* again). A goal of language teaching is that students can interact effectively with aliens from other countries and cultures. It’s not just a matter of learning the culture of English-speaking countries; they may be doing business with people from Russia ... or Saudi

Arabia. So, in situations where they’ll interact with people from a culture they don’t know much about, they need intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence is therefore the useful set of skills or habits that help us communicate effectively with people from anywhere, and these have to be learnt. Our Intercultural Competence course at Shantou University is mainly a language course, but it’s where we instil these basic skills and habits. For example, when I as an American am conversing with a Russian, I don’t have much control over the messages that person sends to me, but I do have control over how I process or make sense of those messages. So, when interacting with someone from a culture I don’t know, I need to make sense of what they are saying more carefully than with someone from my own culture. After all, they are from a different world. It is a little like driving a car – under normal circumstances you are not consciously aware of all the movements you make to control the vehicle. If you hit a patch of black ice, you need to be much more aware of what you are doing. Similarly with intercultural communication, the first step is recognising the situation; the second is bringing the interpretation process to conscious awareness. Our normal pattern is to do most of our sense-making very automatically. Psychologists talk about System 1 and System 2 Thinking, and in the popular book by Daniel Kahneman (2011), he refers to Fast Thinking and Slow Thinking. The basic idea is that we do most of our thinking on automatic pilot, using System 1. It’s instinctive, fast, and generally fairly accurate... *if* you are in a familiar situation. But when you hit that ice you need to be *very aware* of what you are doing, so the trick is to help learners bring the interpretation process to conscious awareness, and get into the habit of thinking more carefully, i.e. bringing System 2 into play.

This subject content is taught through a series of exercises, called “Critical Incident Exercises” (CIEs). You give students a problem scenario in the form of a story, and they have to give different explanations for why the foreigner in the situation did or said what they did. Here, you are building the habit of very consciously addressing this interpretation question, rather than just jumping to conclusions. A second very useful habit is

forcing people to come up with multiple interpretations. The natural tendency is to jump to a conclusion; and normally you go for the most 'obvious' one (meaning the one that is most likely in my culture). We don't want to eliminate that option from consideration – it may in fact be right - but if we can build the habit of considering multiple possibilities, that broadens the range, and increases the chance that you are going to imagine how the other person would look at the situation, or at least imagine what some of the other possibilities are. Therefore, in class exercises participants come up with five possible explanations, and then we share them and talk about them. This is very helpful partly because it slows their interpretation processes down and also makes students more conscious of the process.

And then the last part is making careful selections. The set of options has been created and participants need to think through which options are more likely, and for what reason. Returning to the System 1-System 2 idea, System 2 is where you think more consciously and more carefully about things, but it also costs more in terms of time and effort. Consequently we don't use it as often. However, you need to get into the habit of employing it more in intercultural situations. So, this last process of evaluation is about generalising carefully and mindfully. As an example, it is so natural and so easy to be cheated in the market by one particular vendor from, say, Xinjiang, and then quickly drift into talking about "those Xinjiang people". Before you realise it, you have labelled a whole nation...

Intercultural communication is not just about ideas. The point is to turn ideas into habits, to do something often enough that the habit kicks in in real-life situations. Could I prove that this actually works? No, but I have a wonderful story:

I used to be involved with an NGO that brought foreign teachers to China, and we did a lot of training using CIEs as part of their orientation process. People thought that doing so many such exercises was a little strange, but didn't object too much because it was a fun way to spend an hour or two. However, in the exit interviews we did with teachers when they completed their term and were about to leave China an interesting pattern emerged – I don't remember specifically asking people about the

training, but they would often say, "Hey, you remember all those exercises we did when we first came to China...?" One interview particularly sticks in my mind where a teacher recounted: "I was on a bus in rural Anhui Province. We stopped somewhere, and this peasant woman got on. She had a chicken in a big cage, and she came up to the seat next to me and before she sat down she put the chicken on my lap. Then I heard this little voice in my head: 'Now, think of five possible explanations for why she put the chicken in on your knees...'" So, I believe this training really helps if you do it often enough.

**This is highly relevant to Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)** students who must adapt quickly to another culture, since over 2,000 of them study in the UK every year. Although XJTLU provides preparatory lectures, and awareness videos made by Liverpool students, CIEs will also prepare them to handle unexpected circumstances.

CIEs build another basic skill: being aware of expectations and managing them. Often the problem is not that someone goes somewhere and something bad happens, instead the problem is that they expected one thing but something else happened, totally disorienting them.

In my textbook *Encounters with Westerners*, I cite a Chinese scholar named Chen Xiangming. For her doctoral dissertation, she studied 17 Chinese graduate students in their first year at universities in Boston, as they went through the process of adapting to life in the United States. They had originally thought Americans are easy to get to know and that their own English was pretty good, so it would not be any problem getting to know people. When they actually arrived, they found that making quick casual acquaintances wasn't difficult, but they assumed that these would immediately translate into deeper friendships... and of course that did not happen. They realised that functioning in an English class is very different from listening to two Americans chatting in a bar. So in the study, they went from "Oh, these Americans are very easy to make friends with", to "None of them care about us - they don't *want* to be our friends!" By the end of the year, sadly, none of them had any



significant relationships except with Chinese or other international students. Part of the problem here lay in the expectations, and it is likely that the Chinese students in this study gave up more quickly because they initially expected making American friends to be easy.

There is probably a recognisable pattern that international students go through emotionally, but then hopefully manage to overcome.

Textbooks on cross-cultural adaptation often mention a 'double-U' adaptation pattern in which sojourners initially have good feelings when arriving in a new culture, based in part on the excitement of being in someplace new and interesting, but later go through a low period when they become fatigued as a result of the demands of living in an unfamiliar culture. While the actual experience varies a lot from person to person, it is not unusual for sojourners to go through some kind of culture shock experience. I wish that many got over it, but a great many do not. With regard to Chinese students going to the West, many give up trying to make Western friends fairly early on, and retreat into a house with all-Chinese classmates, where they eat Chinese food and only interact with "foreigners" in class when they have to. Some of this relates to what we were talking about earlier with independent language learning: "My English Gaokao score is good, but do I feel comfortable enough that I will engage with my foreign classmates in a social activity when I have the opportunity?" In many cases they won't.

Perhaps the onus is too much on the student, and the host organisation should have more responsibility to integrate them?

In the last couple of decades, universities have become better at setting up international offices, and do a better job of hosting students. Yet with the large numbers of Chinese students involved, many still drop through the cracks, and *everybody* needs to chip in: the host should do a better job at hosting; the students should try harder to reach out instead of expecting to be hosted; we as teachers need to

do more to ensure that students have reasonable expectations.

Further reading

Chen, X.M. (1998). *Lujuzhe he 'waiguoren': Liu mei zhongguo xuesheng kuawenhua renji jiaowang yanjiu* 旅居者和 '外国人': 留美中国学生跨文化人际交往研究 (*Sojourners and 'Foreigners': A study on Chinese students' intercultural interpersonal relationships in the United States*). Changsha: Hunan Jiaoyu Chubanshe.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. London: Penguin.

Snow, D. (2004). *Encounters with Westerners: Improving skills in English and intercultural communication*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Snow, D. (2006). *More than a native speaker: an introduction to teaching English abroad*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL).

Wang, M., Brislin R.W., Wang, W.Z., Williams, D., & Chao, H.A.J. (2000). *Turning bricks into jade: Critical incidents for mutual understanding among Chinese and Americans*. Boston: Intercultural Press, Inc.

# Oral English Learning in Mainland China

By Momo Fan & Hanbing Tong

*In recent years, spoken English teaching in China has generated much debate. Under the traditional Chinese education system, students pay relatively little attention to spoken English even though it is becoming increasingly important in today's globalized world. In the National College Entrance Examination, commonly known as the Gaokao, students from some provinces do not need to sit the English speaking test element, while for others the exam is a mere formality. Meanwhile, the speaking test in the national College English Test Band Four (CET-4) concentrates on students' ability to use complex sentences and an extended vocabulary, but this bears little relation to real-world speech. Because of this, students focus on memorizing sentences rather than speaking naturally. This article assesses the current status of oral English learning in three provinces in China and articulates the problems involved in learning English for sustained periods of time.*

## Introduction

The Chinese government has introduced many foreign-funded enterprises since the process of 改革开放 or 'opening up and reform' began in 1978 and relations between China and other countries are much closer than ever before. Because of this, the need for qualified personnel with a strong grasp of English is becoming increasingly urgent. Many English teaching programmes are valued by parents and students for their traditional approaches to English oral studies. For example, the New Oriental Language School, first established in Beijing in 1993, provides programmes, services and products exclusively aimed at increasing Gaokao scores. However, it is widely accepted that in its current form the Chinese education system, which should have established a clear baseline for learning English, cannot help students fulfil the growing employment gap in academic, private, and professional spheres (Sun and Henrichsen, 2011). Although there is a clear need for people who can speak fluent English in China, attempts at educational reform remain superficial. This research study aims to investigate the efficacy of the speaking tests in Gaokao and CET-4 national standardized test in oral English studies, and the reasons why Chinese students often struggle to speak fluent English.

The National College Entrance Examination, also known as the Gaokao, is a system that purports to offer standardized testing throughout mainland China. However, we would argue that this is not a truly meritocratic system because of regional variations, which ironically, are intended to create a level playing field between students from different areas. Foreign language learning is compulsory for all students in mainland China; students from minority nationalities may study their own ethnic languages, and some students will choose languages such as Japanese or Russian. Because of regional variations in the Gaokao, the forms and requirements of the English-speaking test also vary tremendously and this has resulted in different teaching methods in high schools.

## Methodology

During this investigation three instances of regional variation in the English-speaking test were explored, and a survey of teaching methods used in high schools was conducted. A series of semi-structured interviews was carried out, both in person and online, with 48 students and five teachers from three different provinces. They were asked to provide information about the Gaokao system, teaching practices, and the English speaking

test in their province. Shanghai and Xinjiang were selected because they offer an extreme contrast in Gaokao variation between eastern and western China. Jiangsu was chosen as a more typical example. It is widely regarded as a province where people pay a great deal of attention to education. In 2010, enrolment on undergraduate and specialized courses in Jiangsu stood at more than 1.6 million, the largest in all the regions (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010).

In theory, the English-speaking test in Shanghai only applies to students who will go on to take up a foreign language major at university. However, in practice the vast majority of students sit this examination. The five parts below comprise the procedure of the speaking test in Shanghai. Since this test is usually only available to Chinese nationals, we have provided an English translation below. The Chinese original can be found in the appendix.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Part One: Reading*

A short article in English is shown on the screen. The candidate is given one minute to prepare and thirty seconds to read it aloud. (Note: The candidate is not expected to read the whole article. The candidate should speak at a normal rate.)

#### *Part Two: Rapid response*

The candidate should answer questions based on the content they hear within a set time period. The candidate listens to five questions through headphones (only the name of the interlocutor is shown on the screen) and gives appropriate answers to each question.

#### *Part Three: Situational questions*

The candidate is given two scenarios and must ask two questions about each scene. The questions must include at least one 'wh-' question (Note: The candidate does not need to answer the questions).

#### *Part Four: Individual Talk*

The candidate is asked to talk about a particular topic, which usually relates to society, family, school, environment, morality, the Internet, etc. These topics are derived from popular culture and often relate to daily life.

The candidate is given one minute to prepare the topic shown on the screen and will then talk for one minute. The candidate should say at least six sentences based on the given topic.

#### *Part Five: Describing*

A series of pictures accompanied by a one-line description are shown on the screen. The candidate is given one minute to prepare and has one minute to describe the pictures. The candidate should say at least six sentences (not including the given description).

#### Discussion and analysis

The test purports to prepare students to speak in English in any given situation. However, students talk to a computer rather than a real person and, as such, this cannot test students' ability to speak English in everyday situations. The speaking test in Shanghai stands in stark contrast to the one in Xinjiang. In Xinjiang, students do not need to take either the speaking or the listening test because these do not affect the final score. As a consequence, teachers do not focus on students' oral English in class. One student from Urumqi Bayi High School stated: “我们平时不练口语因为我们不用参加考试。而且我们很少在课堂上和老师对话，她只会让我们做考试卷然后讲题” or “We did not practice spoken English because we do not need to sit for the test. Besides, we seldom talked with our teacher in class; she just let us practice examination papers and then answered some questions we may have.”<sup>2</sup> To a large extent, the contrast between Shanghai and Xinjiang is a result of differences in teaching allocation between the eastern and western parts of China. In 2012, educational investment in Shanghai was over 700 billion RMB (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2012) while it was only 472 billion RMB in Xinjiang (Government of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China, 2013). Shanghai is one of the largest cities in China and is markedly more cosmopolitan than most. The economy is rapidly developing and top graduates from Normal Universities usually aspire to work there. By contrast, one of the teachers in our survey claimed that educators do not usually want to work in Xinjiang since

<sup>1</sup>For appendices, please refer to the online version of this article at [etic.xjtlu.edu.cn](http://etic.xjtlu.edu.cn).

<sup>2</sup>Translation by authors.

salaries and the standard of living there are relatively low. This makes it difficult for students to access high quality education and reach the national standard of spoken English.

Jiangsu Provincial Education Examination Authority (JSEEA) requires all students in Jiangsu to take the English-speaking test before the Gaokao. Every year it provides every student with a booklet that contains all of the possible questions complete with sample answers. The test questions are then taken from this booklet. Students begin to memorize the booklet two months before the test. In the English-speaking test, students merely need to recite what they have memorized. According to one student from *南京师范大学附属中学* or 'The High School Affiliated to Nanjing Normal University' her teacher told her to “这个口语小册子你们不要以为你考完口语就没用了，以后写作文还是要用的” or “Use this booklet to pass the speaking test but remember that it will mainly provide useful sentences for your English writing test.”<sup>3</sup> This is because the writing test counts for 25 marks, which is nearly one-fifth of the total marks, while the speaking test is not included in the final scores at all. JSEEA likes to emphasize the importance of the English-speaking test but in reality, it does not affect the final grade.

According to the students interviewed at *江苏省张家港市暨阳高级中学* or Zhangjiagang Jiyang High School, Jiangsu, students are more concerned with how to increase their test grades rather than with actually learning English. This is because the English certificate is widely regarded as a passport to a more successful career. A large number of Chinese universities require students to pass the College English Test Band Four (CET-4) as part of their undergraduate degree and companies often ask for this certification when graduates apply for jobs (see also Greatrex and Shu, this issue). It is for this reason that English is a compulsory course in most Chinese universities (Woodward, 2008). In his history of English learning in China, Woodward argues that the ability to speak English as a second language already had a high market value in China as early as 1880 and that people who could speak English often obtained lucrative opportunities

for employment. In an interview for *武汉晚报* or *Wuhan Evening News*, Zhang Jun, Head of the Department of Journalism at Hubei University of Economics, stated that in his university, College Chinese accounts for three credits while College English covers at least twelve credits. He felt that the proportion of English-language teaching was too high, but people had no choice but to adapt to the changing social climate (Wen, 2013). English courses such as these are predominantly designed to help students pass the CET-4. According to CET (n.d) the CET-4 speaking test assesses students speaking ability in six key areas, namely accuracy, complexity of vocabulary and grammar, participation in discussion, coherence, flexibility, and relevance. Only those students who pass the written examination are permitted to take the speaking test. Higher marks are typically awarded for reciting overly complex sentences using a rich vocabulary, even though this would not normally occur in real life. Consequently the 'conversation' becomes a matter of mechanically transferring overly elaborate sentences from written English into speech. Compared with the speaking test in the Gaokao, CET-4 seemingly requires a higher level of English but it still cannot be used as an accurate measure of spoken English in the real world.

Since the tests and teaching methods pay little attention to the oral English skills of students, it is a common situation in China for a university student to stammer when he or she needs to use English to communicate with others. This particular phenomenon is typically referred to as 'Mute English' (Niu & Wolff, 2010). When Chinese students learn English as a foreign language over the course of many years they may gain the ability to read and write with fluency, but often find that their spoken English is relatively poor. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon; one is the lack of opportunities to practice English with native speakers and the second is related to Chinese culture. Firstly, foreigners in Shanghai comprise approximately 0.7 percent of the population (Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau, 2009 and Shanghai Statistics, 2009) whilst foreigners accounted for 40 percent in

<sup>3</sup>Translation by authors.

London in 2012 (The Migration Observatory, 2013) and 35.7 percent in New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Thus, even though Shanghai is the most cosmopolitan city in China, there are still relatively few foreigners. As a consequence, Chinese people rarely have the opportunity to communicate with native English speakers. Meanwhile, most teachers in schools and universities are Chinese. As a result, students prefer to think and talk in Chinese even during English classes. Artificial English-speaking environments often fail to encourage students to study oral English. Although some students are eager to speak English naturally and fluently, they are still used to translating their ideas from Chinese into English rather than thinking in English and this may hinder their expression. Secondly, some Chinese people find it embarrassing to talk in English with each other. Chinese people usually consider themselves to be reserved and shy; they are afraid of making mistakes and talking in a way in which they are unfamiliar. If they are not sure whether the sentence they are about to say is grammatically correct, they would rather not say it at all (Liu & Zhao, 2011). In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that speaking English in public, especially with another Chinese person, may be seen as deliberately showing off. To some extent, people who speak English are regarded as superior to others and well-educated but this attitude is also symptomatic of China's generally uncritical embrace of Western culture. Therefore, students sometimes dare not speak English, even when they are able to.

In recent years, as China has come to occupy an increasingly important role on the world stage, corresponding levels of interest have been focused on English-language learning throughout the nation. However, the traditional Chinese education system is currently ill-equipped to help students gain

fluency in spoken English, even if they achieve proficiency in reading and writing. Attempts to reform the Gaokao and CET-4 are indicative of the authorities' increased focus on English-language teaching. However, to date, many of these changes remain superficial. In order to help students truly master the language, perhaps we should explore more organic, creative, and discussion-based approaches.

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**Momo Fan** is a Year-2 student at XJTLU studying in the Department of English, Culture and Communication (ECC) for the degree of BA in English and Finance.



**Hanbing Tong** is a Year-2 student at XJTLU studying in the Department of English, Culture and Communication (ECC) for the degree of BA in Applied English.

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## Appendix

### 第一部分短文朗读

屏幕上显示一篇英语短文。考生有1分钟的时间准备，然后有30秒的时间朗读。（注意：不要求考生在30秒内将短文全部读完，考生应以正常的语速朗读。）

### 第二部分快速应答

要求考生针对所听到的情景在规定的时间内进行应答。考生将从耳机中听到5道题目的录音（屏幕显示对话者，但不显示题目），考生应根据各题的内容，给予适当的应答。每题的答题时间为4秒。

### 第三部分情景提问

这一部分将提供给考生两个情景，考生根据所给情景的要求，对每个情景分别提两个问题（第1-2题为一个情景，第3-4题为一个情景），所提的问题中至少要有一个特殊疑问句（注意：不必回答问题），每个小题的答题时间为10秒，每个情景的答题时间为20秒。

### 第四部分谈话

要求考生针对所给的话题讲述自己的观点。此类话题往往涉及到社会、家庭、学校、环保、道德、网络等方面。这些都是与日常生活密切相关的或比较热门的话题。考生根据屏幕上显示画面及话题，准备1分钟，然后答题，答题时间为1分钟。要求考生根据所给话题，至少讲出6句话。

### 第五部分看图说话

考生将在屏幕上看到一组图片和描述图片的第一句话。然后屏幕依次显示放大的每一副图片，最后再回到总画面。考生有1分钟时间准备，然后有1分钟时间对图片进行描述。要求考生至少讲6句话（不包括已给的句子）。

考试前建议考生强化朗读技能，高中和初中书后的单词表要按音标正确朗读。平时多积累词汇，在教师的指导下，挑选一些代表性的句子，经常操练。考生要克服羞涩心理，挑战错误，努力开口，利用一切可以练习英语的机会，只要你做个有心人，把握机遇，你一定会说一口流利的英语。

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# Teaching Spoken English in China: Divergence and Washback

By Terry Greatrex & Shu Deng

## Introduction

The formal teaching of English in China has historically focussed more on the receptive skills of reading and listening than on the productive ones of writing and, particularly, speaking (Feng, 2009; Wang, 2006). This paper takes a brief look at the current situation with respect to teaching spoken English in China. It touches on the policy background, then reviews some published discussion on the divergence between theory and practice, and how teaching for examinations is impacting on how Chinese students learn to speak in English.

## Policy

Current national policy on English education in China makes explicit mention of the need to improve the spoken English ability of students. In 2004, the Ministry of Education issued and trialled the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, extending them nationally in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007). In this document, broad requirements, usually expressed in two to four sentences, are listed for listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation and recommended vocabulary at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. Descriptors at the basic level include guidelines that students “should be able to communicate

in English in the course of learning, to conduct discussions on a given theme, and to talk about everyday topics in English” along with giving short talks and using basic conversational strategies. At the intermediate level, these expand to an ability “to hold conversations in fairly fluent English” with “basically correct pronunciation and intonation”. At the advanced level, a “certain degree of fluency and accuracy” in speaking is specified, to be produced using “fairly difficult language” with an expectation that learners should be able to “deliver papers at academic conferences and participate in discussions”.

These requirements reinforced an existing policy trend toward a greater emphasis on enabling students to speak in English (Du, 2012, p. 1). The term Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which aims to enable students to “use the language for meaningful communication” (Richards, 2006, p. 3), has become more frequent in discussions among both proponents of the Western model of CLT (e.g. Liao, 2004) and those who think the model needs adaptation to the Chinese situation (e.g. Hu, 2005). Stanley (2013, p.24) identifies three “constraints” that are preventing the adoption of the Western CLT model in China. These are firstly, the resistance to and misunderstanding of language as systemic, meaning-based discourse and

language learning as acquisition through communicative use, secondly, Chinese teachers' lack of communicative competence in English, and thirdly, washback from examinations. This review will touch on the first and third of these.

Before doing so, it should be recalled that China is a vast country, and there is almost certainly no generalisation that covers all situations. Feng (2009) for example, categorised English education policy-practice divergences into three categories, and there are likely others. He identified regional and urban-rural differences, socioeconomic status differences, and ethnicity differences that affect accessibility to English education in China. The 2007 Ministry of Education *College English Curriculum Requirements* also recognised this situation in stating that:

“As China is a large country with conditions that vary from region to region and from college to college, the teaching of College English should follow the principle of providing different guidance for different groups of students” (p. 25).

This seems to indicate that the degree of implementation of policy will be stronger or weaker as they map onto underlying differences associated with location, wealth or ethnicity.

Divergence between the theory and practice of language acquisition

The first of the constraints listed by Stanley refers to how language and language learning is conceptualised. There have been a number of recent attempts to understand language acquisition as a non-linear, socially and historically situated process, and language as the (usually verbal) patterns of meaning-bearing symbols that emerge as people communicate. Examples include the application of *Sociocultural Theory* (Johnson, 2004), *Language Ecology* (Kramsch, 2008), *Dynamic Systems Theory* (Larsen-Freeman, 1997), and *Language as a Local Practice* (Pennycook, 2010). This contrasts with more traditional methods that view language as a collection of discrete grammatical and lexical items, and language acquisition as the learning

of (or perhaps about) these items.

In the traditional approach, reading, writing and listening are ‘learnt’ first and are then used to produce correct speech in the new language. Oral English, as Stanley (2013) puts it, is a “capstone course designed to ‘activate’ students’ English” (p. 21). In the newer approaches to language learning, language is understood to be socially constructed by users as they negotiate meaning among themselves. It is not a linear process whereby input is converted into predictable output but an iterative process. Repetition and feedback work in the user to develop alternate periods of stability and instability in macro-skills such as conversational speech or extensive listening. In this approach, the teaching and learning of speaking occurs early and continuously in the development of interactional competence.

Stanley (2013, p. 137) claims that the misunderstanding of what language is and how it is acquired is accompanied by resistance from Chinese teachers to these theories and their implementation in practice. It is not clear however, that Chinese teachers uniformly misunderstand the purpose of CLT. Yan (2012) for example, in a study of the response to curriculum reform of three secondary school teachers in Hubei Province, found a high-level of endorsement of the new approach designed to promote “a blend of constructivist and communicative task-based teaching to cultivate students’ communicative competence” (p. 435). Despite this endorsement however, it was observed that lessons by the teachers were not communicative. They were “lock-step” with “minimal use of pair/group work” with the teacher talking to the whole class and covering a “large quantity of contents” with listening and speaking “gone through briefly and quickly, or omitted” (p. 437-8). This divergence between accepted theory and practice has also been observed at tertiary level. Wette and Barkhuizen (2009) found that a group of 200 Chinese teachers of English for Academic Purposes in a range of universities in China reported a tension between “teaching the book” (subject-centred or traditional approaches) and “educating the person” (learner-centred or communicative approaches). Three specific sources of tension were identified. One was between the need to teach to the exam and to develop

communicative skills. Another source of tension was between teaching the subject, English, and helping students achieve personal goals through English, and a third between the teachers and their students whom they perceived as only wanting to study English in order to pass exams.

To summarise, there appears to be some degree of willingness on the part of teachers in China to accept the teaching of English with communicative methods, however this acceptance does not always translate into actual communicative lessons at high schools and universities.

#### The effects of examination washback

Washback (or backwash) refers to the impact examinations have on the teaching and learning of a subject. The concept is frequently mentioned in China with reference to the nationally administered College English Test (CET) (Cheng, 2008; Hua, 2006; Li, Zhong, & Suen, 2012; Zhan, 2009). All university majors in China require at least two years of English study and, in order to graduate, students often need to take the CET (Cheng, 2008, p. 17). Typically, second-year university students take the CET-4 test and third-year students take the CET-6 test. CET includes sections for writing (15% of the total score), listening (35%), reading (35%), and translation (15%) with no testing of speech. A CET-Spoken English Test (CET-SET) can be taken by those who have achieved relatively high scores in the other CET tests (550 out of 710 for CET-4, and 520 for CET-6). There is a particular interest in the washback of the CET tests in the context of national policy statements encouraging a greater emphasis on the teaching of spoken English.

An investigation conducted in 2003 by Gu (2005, in Li et al., 2012) into CET washback found that the perceived impact by a range of stakeholders was generally more positive than negative but that there was a greater influence on content, pace and teachers' attitudes than on teaching methods. The report did not mention specific effects on the learning of spoken English, but this result appears to dovetail with the divergence noted in the previous section between attitudes and practice. A follow-up study by Yang, Gu and Liu (2013) reported that, despite some changes in

teaching methods, the traditional "teacher-centered" (p. 322) mode of instruction persisted in 2009. It was even noted that, possibly for reasons to do with the content of other English classes, the emphasis on speaking in the CET classes actually decreased over the period. The lack of apparent impact of test washback is supported by Zhao (2004) who focused specifically on the CET Spoken English Test and asked whether CET-SET had a washback effect on teachers' and learners' attitudes and actions. Teachers and learners for the CET-SET have the requirements of a spoken English language test in mind, but while this produced a strong washback on teachers' and learners' attitudes towards College English teaching and learning, it did not result in significant changes in their actions, that is, in what they learnt and how they learnt it (Zhao, 2004, p. 50).

In other studies of washback from CET preparation classes, the findings are mixed. In one, the impact on the teaching of spoken English was reported to be positive. Hua (2006) looked at the impact of CET-4 preparation classes at three teachers colleges and compared them to regular English classes. Despite the fact that speaking was not taught in the preparation classes, it was claimed that both courses seemed able to cultivate students' "comprehensive language abilities" (p. 59), including speaking. This may have been because the preparation course was quite short – lasting only for the second half of the second semester in the second year (four to six weeks) before the test – and the momentum gained in previous semesters in confidence and ability in spoken English may still have been evident while students focused on the tested skills in the CET preparation classes. This contrasts with a study that focused on the affective impact of CET-4 preparation classes on learners. Li, Zhong and Suen (2012) surveyed 150 undergraduate students at a high-ranking university in Beijing. Around 63 per cent were not confident that preparing for the CET helped them to speak or write English better, and 58 per cent did not think they were more able to use English in real situations. These were higher than the percentages for reading (46.7), listening (50) and overall proficiency (52.7). The authors concluded that students appear to be "sensitive to what is assessed in the CET and

the weight it gives to different language skills” (2012, p. 89) and as a result, work more on improving their listening and reading than their writing and speaking.

The general finding in these CET studies that examination washback does not have a clear impact on teaching and learning is supported by a parallel study on washback from the International English Language Teaching System (IELTS) in China. IELTS tests Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skills in a high-stakes examination used by many universities and immigration offices as an application prerequisite for non-native English speakers. Badger and Yan (2012) undertook a study involving “approximately 70” Chinese teachers of IELTS preparation classes in China. They used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation schedules, field notes of classes, and stimulated recall interviews to gather data to address their research question “To What Extent is Communicative Language Teaching a Feature of IELTS Classes in China?” They found that although the teaching aims or pedagogic orientation of IELTS teachers to some degree reflected the speaking requirements of the test, IELTS preparation lessons in the observed classes remained generally more teacher-centred than is usual in communicative language classes, with widespread use of L1. They attribute this in part to the lack of English language ability of Chinese teachers and to insufficient teacher development in delivering IELTS preparation classes.

## Conclusion

This survey has touched on some recent research into two aspects of the teaching of spoken English in China; the divergence of practice from policy and theory, and the effects of examination washback. While there appears to be some support from secondary and tertiary educators for the trend in policy toward more communicative language teaching, this may not have resulted yet in significant changes in teaching behaviour. A number of reasons have been suggested for this, including a lack of training and English ability among teachers, and the retention of a traditional understanding of the process of language acquisition. Other factors, such as class size and work pressure on teachers have also been proposed, but it is not possible to

cover them in this brief review.

The impact of washback has received some attention by researchers but without definitive results. Upon reflection, this should perhaps not be surprising. As Wall (2000) notes, test impact is a complex phenomenon and “it should not be assumed that a ‘good’ test will automatically produce good effects in the classroom, or that a ‘bad’ test will necessarily produce negative ones” (p. 505). However, a link between teaching practice and examination washback can be asserted, as Wall (2000) does, in that “a positive impact from test design can only be expected if the materials and practices they are based on are effective” (p. 507). If sound pedagogical theory on language acquisition is used to develop effective teaching practices in supportive conditions, a well-designed test has a better chance of positively impacting learning.

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Terry Greatrex teaches in the Language Centre at XJTLU in Suzhou. He has also taught in China at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo and Guangxi Normal University in Guilin as well as in New Zealand and Japan. He is particularly interested in encouraging autonomous learning and the affective aspects of language learning.

Terry.Greatrex@xjtlu.edu.cn



Shu Deng currently teaches at XJTLU. She has an MA in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management and MA in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Her main research interests are in student motivation and higher education.

# Rater Reliability on Criterion-referenced Speaking Tests in IELTS and Joint Venture Universities

By James Lee

## Introduction

The global expansion of Higher Education has been particularly marked in China, where a number of English-medium universities have been established over the past decade. These institutions, generally known as Joint Venture (JV) Universities, tend to offer a significant amount of language support through intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) provision, and there is a need, as on most courses, to accurately assess the language level of students. Speaking assessment constitutes a significant amount of such testing and is of great importance for both the students and the institution, as it provides evidence of both the students' abilities and the effectiveness of the teaching.

While JV assessment is in-house, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a high-stakes global test which uses assessment criteria as a basis for its direct assessment of candidates' spoken English. Indeed, Alexander, Argent and Spencer (2008, p. 327) have claimed that large-scale language exams, such as IELTS, introduced the concept of assessment criteria and are responsible therefore for improvements in reliability within EAP institutions. The IELTS test is particularly influential in China because of the sheer number of candidates who sit it every week.

Historically, there was reluctance to use subjective tests due to their perceived unreliability (Hughes, 1989, p. 53). Currently, the use of criterion-referenced speaking assessments is widespread. One issue which they raise, however, is that of rater reliability. Here rater reliability will be considered; in particular, to what extent raters' interpretations of criteria can be considered to be reliable. The article will then examine particular reliability issues faced by IELTS and JV Universities and identify ways in which those challenges can be met.

## Reliability

An effective test needs to be reliable. Reliability ensures that the score is an accurate reflection of the student's knowledge. Scoring should be consistent no matter when or where the test is taken (test reliability), nor who marks it (rater reliability). Reliability, therefore, is an assurance that test results are the best possible indicator of a candidate's performance. It implies consistency and accuracy of measurement.

There are generally considered to be two aspects to rater reliability. Inter-rater reliability is concerned with the consistency of scoring displayed across a group of raters, whereas intra-rater reliability refers to how consistent

one rater is at giving an accurate score on different occasions (Bachman, 1990, p. 178). Inter-rater reliability is established by comparing the scores of different raters, while checking intra-rater reliability involves re-marking tests after a long period of time. There appears to be no easy way to ensure rater reliability however. Hughes (1989, p.36) has claimed that rater reliability can never be guaranteed when there is a subjective element to the rating.

### Factors affecting rater reliability

Different areas of inter-rater inconsistency have been identified. Certain raters can be classed as being more severe or more lenient than the norm. This may stem from the rater's personality or cultural background. A rater's particular rating style means that they do not divide their attention evenly among the various criteria used. Carey, Mannell, and Dunn (2011) found that familiarity with a candidate's accent was likely to lead to an examiner awarding higher marks for pronunciation in speaking tests, and non-native examiners rated candidates from their own country higher than those from different locations. Similarly Winke, Gass, and Myford (2013) have claimed that if an examiner has experience of communicating in the L1 of the test-taker, they are more likely to show leniency to that candidate. This would seem to support the view of McNamara (2000, p. 38) that the score cannot be separated from the rater; it is a reflection both of the performance of the candidate and the beliefs of the scorer. Subjectivity causes even experienced raters to disagree over borderline cases. As a result, whether a candidate achieves a certain score can be dependent on how lucky (or unlucky) they are in being assigned a certain examiner.

Inconsistency in inter-rater reliability also stems from the criteria used for rating; raters understand and use the rating scales differently, or have conflicting interpretations of the criteria themselves. Raters need to arrive at a set of scores by considering their overall impression of a candidate's answers, noting any specific features contained within, and matching these to the wordings of the descriptors. However, no set of descriptors can adequately cover all of the possible language

produced – raters may need to develop a range of strategies in order to help negotiate these problem areas, which can lead to a conflict between their intuition and the criteria. It is unclear how raters resolve this tension. Criteria need to be as wide-ranging as possible, but although broad criteria allow raters a greater degree of flexibility when it comes to assigning marks to a candidate, they also necessitate a significant degree of judgement on the part of the rater. According to Alderson, Clapham, and Wall (1995, p. 108), it is a considerable challenge for raters to understand the principles behind rating scales and to interpret them consistently. For Alexander et al. (2008, p. 335) it is the complexity of texts which mean that it is often very difficult to interpret assessment criteria. Speech can be unbalanced, strong in places, weak in others, which creates confusion in the mind of the rater. It is crucial for raters not to be constrained by the descriptors but to use them to justify their decisions (ibid.).

### Intra-rater reliability

Interpretation of scoring criteria can also affect intra-rater reliability. There is a possibility that when rating a number of examinees who make grammatical errors, after a while a rater may begin to focus more critically on the grammar descriptors, and candidates who were marked first will score higher than later ones. Alternatively scoring may be relaxed; for example, the same pronunciation issues heard again and again may seem less explicit in later candidates compared to previous speakers (Bachman, 1990, p. 179). This may be linked to marking load. In a test where students are being judged on content, a rater who has heard the same ideas up to 80 times may feel that later test-takers lack originality.

### Rater reliability in the IELTS test

Over 1.7 million IELTS tests are taken every year, 300,000 of which are sat in China (British Council, n.d.). The Speaking component is a criterion-referenced test, rated by a trained Examiner. Detailed performance descriptors measure different aspects of candidates' spoken capabilities, and the exam uses analytic rating scales, which allow the rater to narrow down the focus to one or two grades, and then

'fine-tune' their score. IELTS has funded a number of research projects on rater reliability, and made them publicly available on its website in an effort to ensure that the scoring procedure is fair and rater reliability is high. Blackhurst (2004, p. 18) states that when speaking scores were double marked in 2003, there was a correlation of 0.91, which is considered a high level of rating reliability. Nevertheless, Uysal (2010, p. 316) has suggested that the claim that use of analytic rating scales means that reliability increases is unsubstantiated.

IELTS requires their Examiners to examine on a regular basis, and Examiners need to re-certify every two years, or if they go three months without examining. In China, examiners may rate up to 20 speaking exams per day, for as many as four or five days in a row. This heavy testing load may have implications on the intra-rater reliability of the test, particularly if this is a 'second job' for the rater. Uysal (2010, p. 319) has emphasized the need for constant calculation of both intra- and inter-rater reliability measures. The vast numbers of tests being taken every week will similarly have an effect on inter-rater reliability. McNamara (2000, p. 42) has also identified potential problems with the IELTS reference to "native-speaker level competency" as a standard to be achieved. He suggests that this is a misleading term, as performances of native speakers (NS) vary considerably. A number of non-native speakers (NNS) are employed as IELTS Examiners, but only after achieving a Band 9 ('native speaker level') in the test themselves. To date, however, there is scant research on differences in rating between NS and NNS Examiners in IELTS.

Hall (2010, p. 324) claims that the IELTS marking and standardization process is as rigorous as possible. The IELTS website (IELTS, n.d.) states that "IELTS Examiners undergo intensive face to face training and standardization to ensure that they can apply the descriptors in a valid and reliable manner". Raters take a two-day training course prior to qualification as a Speaking Examiner and at the end of this course, are required to rate a number of candidates accurately in order to progress to Examiner status. The training procedure uses what Alderson et al. (1995, p. 131) refer to as "reliability scripts". These are

scripts (or, for the speaking component, videos of exam performances) for which a consensus on the score has been reached. Trainees should identify features in the criteria which explain the scoring. Newly-qualified Examiners also have their first assessments double-marked by an experienced Examiner Trainer. Raters are then randomly moderated by Examiner Trainers, however perhaps as little as 1% of their examining will be moderated in this way in China. Thus the vast majority of scores are single-marked, i.e. trusted solely to the judgment of that examiner. The importance of double-marking is a complex and contested issue. Uysal (2010, p.315) claims that it is widely accepted that scoring accuracy can be improved by multiple marking, yet Hall (2010, p.323) highlights problems which can arise when tests are double-marked, for example, if two raters arrive at the same score, we cannot be sure that both arrived there for the same reason.

#### Rater reliability in Joint Venture Universities

JV Universities in China provide EAP instruction to students on an unprecedented scale. At Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in Suzhou, for example, there are over 2000 new students each academic year, and each has up to 10 hours per week of English classes and needs to achieve a pass grade to progress in their undergraduate studies. JV institutions need to accurately measure the Academic English ability of significant numbers of students, across a number of academic disciplines. As a result, ensuring rater reliability is crucial. The large numbers of test takers involved present various problems:

- 1) Tutors tend to have a large amount of rating to do in a very short time, which can affect intra-rater reliability;
- 2) Heavy workloads reduce opportunities for double marking;
- 3) Differing interpretations of criteria are multiplied as the number of raters increases, affecting inter-rater reliability;
- 4) JV raters tend to come from a variety of backgrounds. A small study by Shi (2001) found that Chinese nationals and Native



Speakers justified their ratings in different ways and were unsure how to apply different criteria in writing tasks. This finding could reasonably be extended to speaking tasks. A lack of consensus among teachers is likely to prove confusing for students both in terms of teaching and assessment feedback;

- 5) One final important issue is whether tutors should assess their own students or another teacher's classes.

A key way to improve rater reliability is to hold regular standardization meetings. A number of researchers have emphasized the importance of these meetings. Alderson et al. (1995, p. 130) propose that ideally there should be a Chief Examiner who conducts standardization meetings. It would appear to be extremely important that in JV Universities there is at least an Exam Officer role, with overall responsibility for training raters on how to interpret criteria, the importance of which has been emphasized by Hughes (1989, p. 55). Crucially, standardization allows discussion of discrepancies in scores given by different raters, with a particular focus on the way that descriptors are interpreted by individual raters. McNamara (2000, p. 44) suggests that peer pressure is useful for 'reining in' some more extreme markers. Monitoring of raters is obviously necessary to ensure that institutional assessment standards are being complied with. While the judgment of a candidate's performance is by nature multi-faceted and complex, and we can never be entirely sure how an original marker arrived at their score, sufficient training and reorientation, with a particular emphasis on dealing with conflicting interpretations, can help improve reliability and familiarity with how institutions view the criteria of their tests. Standardization sessions provide an opportunity for teachers to explore their cultural backgrounds and compare rater expectations, and may give insights into educational systems and teacher beliefs. As new institutions, it is important for JV Universities to be clear and transparent in their assessment procedures.

Alexander et al. (2008, p. 335) state that the assessment criteria need to be used as a framework for discussion in standardization meetings. This ensures consistency as it allows

markers to deal with discrepancies collaboratively, and evaluate the effectiveness of the descriptors. This collaboration enables new teachers to become familiar with the assessment practices and expectations of an institution and can lead to improvements of the existing criteria. Such meetings may lead to frank exchanges and a degree of, hopefully minor, conflict, yet this is a necessary by-product of employing independent thinkers who consider texts deeply and react differently to them. Evidence from the recruitment practices of JV Universities in China thus far seems to suggest that the importance of employing well-qualified teaching practitioners is being recognized and this should continue in order to further intelligent debate centred around speaking test descriptors.

### Final thoughts

Rater reliability is an important touchstone of how effective a speaking test is at measuring what it sets out to measure. If rating is not reliable, all of the hard work invested in constructing a valid test will have been in vain (Alderson et al., 1995, p. 105). The use of criterion-referenced assessment offers the chance to measure a candidate's test performance in detail. Despite this, the interpretation of those criteria by the person assigned to rate a candidate will always have an element of subjectivity. While this may suggest that reaching consensus among raters is an impossible goal, this paper has identified certain steps toward improving reliability.

IELTS tries to ensure the reliability of its tests by putting a large emphasis on initial examiner training, using reliability scripts to bring new examiners into line with the expectations of the organization; examiners are closely monitored to begin with, and thereafter obliged to examine on a regular basis.

However, regular practice may not be enough to ensure reliability, particularly in cases where examiners have a heavy workload. The rapid expansion of JV Universities means that they will need to address similar concerns about rater reliability in order to prove the validity of their assessment. It seems that it would be particularly useful to hold standardization meetings to explore what descriptors represent and to understand

clearly how raters interpret and apply these criteria. Close monitoring and analysis by experienced raters is also essential. JV Universities have a large amount of expertise to draw upon, and this should be channeled effectively to ensure that standards are continually being met.

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James Lee is an EAP Tutor at XJTLU in Suzhou, China. He has taught in Slovakia, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Mexico and the UK. He is currently conducting research into International Students' experiences studying EAP in China.

[james.lee@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:james.lee@xjtlu.edu.cn)



# Debate and Lower Proficiency Students

By Ediyanto Liu

## Introduction

There has long been a shared belief among many educators of the pedagogical benefits of debate, some of which include improved analytical skills, academic attainment, and oral communication skills in the learner/s' first language (L1) or even in a foreign language learning context (Davidson, 1995; Nisbett, 2003; Akerman & Neale, 2011). This improvement is possibly due to the nature of the task in a debate activity where a topic is selected, two differing positions are assigned to groups of students, and an issue in the topic is explored more-in-depth through oral exchanges by both sides usually in a competitive atmosphere. Such benefits have led to the call for classroom debate to be implemented across the curriculum at both high school and college or university levels (Bellon, 2000).

In the last two decades, those pioneering the use of debate as a teaching tool have often been science teachers. Its use in the science context was investigated by Zohar and Nemet (2001) who taught a group of Israeli secondary school students how to construct arguments in a biology class on the topic of human genetics. The study showed that after the instruction, the experimental group used more factually correct content knowledge in the debate and even performed better than the control group

in the biology test that followed. These results are in tune with another study conducted on secondary students in France where Simonneaux (2001, 2002, as cited in Akerman & Neale, 2011) found improved knowledge in the same subject.

In the English as a Second Language (ESL) context, Anitha and Anitha (n.d. as cited in Akerman & Neale, 2011) observed the use of debate by Singaporean students at primary, secondary and junior college levels and found an increase in lexical accuracy as the activity focused on form and was a meaningful communicative task. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Fukuda (2003) reported a significant increase in Japanese university students' confidence in expressing their opinions. Prior to the debate, only 30.8% of students had the confidence to communicate their ideas; however, after the debate the figure increased to 56.7 percent. In another study conducted in the same country, undergraduate students expressed a perceived improvement in their English communication skills, having participated in debate activities (Inoue & Nakano, 2004).

As debate is a complex form of communication where immediate responses are expected (Lubetsky et al., 2000, as cited in Lieb, 2007), generally there is reluctance on the part of teachers to hold it in a mixed ability class. The claim made by Stewart (2003) that

75 percent of his “unmotivated and reserved” (p.1) students rated debate as their favourite activity prompted the same observation regarding two lower proficiency students in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) debate activities earlier this year.

### The Observation

The two students, X and Y, whose L1 is Mandarin Chinese, took the one-year EAP Science module for sophomore students at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, an English medium university which awards dual undergraduate degrees from the two aforesaid universities. X and Y were in two different classes and were quiet and shy. They had been attending their respective classes for four weeks when the debate with the motion ‘Provision of clean water is the most important thing to do in the aftermath of a natural disaster’ was conducted by dividing each class into two groups of five students, with a few other students being appointed as judges. To further create a formal atmosphere, the debate was recorded by using a non-intrusive digital voice recorder. After the two groups had prepared for or against the motion, each group representative was asked to present the arguments in two to three minutes before the rebuttal session that lasted between twelve and eighteen minutes began.

X’s team was for the motion and he happened to be in a group of five where the rest were all female students. It took him eight minutes before breaking his silence. During the entire 12.5-minute debate, he had two turns and spoke for about thirty seconds, with the first turn clocking nineteen seconds. The following is the transcript of his contribution:

X: Eh let’s think...what [*other students’ laughter*] let’s think what these people after the disease [disaster] what they will do they want to survive after they eh climb out the underground [*other students’ laughter*] they will do they will find some water some food to eat or drink ok? That’s the most important thing to do.

S [another student]: But this water needs to be transported, how can you do that?

X: Yes, transport is one way to find the clean

water [eh? S sounded surprised at this answer] this is only the one way maybe there are some other ways.

S: But only some people can find water; most people need help....

Y’s team was against the motion. The duration of the debate in his class was eighteen minutes and his contribution lasted one minute and five seconds. Only in the twelfth minute did he take his first turn by rebutting the point the opposing team member had made earlier:

Y: Eh maybe you said the river is pollute but the water is enough so when we can saving time to do another important thing without to eh...[unclear] clean water to other people we can saving time do another thing maybe for food maybe saving people and the when the disaster happen we have to minder [remember] one is save the people in the disaster and another to transit people is safety but the place not safety so we can’t transit people into another place it’s the same important to eh to save people in the disaster it hard maybe died I think is the eh one of the most important thing of eh and eh maybe sometimes eh more important the eh than the water.

A [another student]: You said after the natural disaster the most important thing is to ensure more and more people can save after the disaster right? But to ensure the more people alive after the disaster the most important is to provide enough water to him or her.

Y did not have a chance to respond to A as another student from his group took the turn. After a few further exchanges among the two groups, Y commented briefly on what the other team member said but his speech was not intelligible at all.

The transcription reveals X’s attempt to reiterate the importance of water by illustrating the need to first search for water in a disaster. This seemed sufficiently logical although it could be considered rudimentary. His poor language ability might have caused this. If the debate had been administered in his L1, probably this would not have been the

case. The same could be said of Y's argument. He reminded the opposite team to prioritize other factors such as finding food and moving people to safe places.

X and Y's participation in the debate was least expected, especially given their personality and ability. After the debate, further feedback was sought from X and Y through a one-to-one meeting. Several reasons for participation were mentioned in the feedback. In the case of X, the first reason was to help his group win the debate. He confided that being the only male student in the group gave him the extra motivation. Another reason he had was that he felt good working in the group; he and his group members had built a good rapport during the preparation stage. He also claimed that he enjoyed the pressure in the debate as he was challenged to think and respond immediately to other students' arguments.

Y mentioned that the reason he finally took the turn was that he had been following the debate and he disagreed with the other group's opinion. The cause for his late turn-taking was that he waited for the opportunity when the other group would make a mistake, and he would then seize upon it to prove them wrong. He further added that the fact that all his group members had made contributions also slightly influenced his decision to speak. During the preparation stage, he disagreed with one of the group members; however, this did not lessen his enjoyment of working in his group of one female and four male students.

### Conclusion

The observation reveals that the two lower proficiency students in this mixed ability class were willing and able to contribute to the debate activity even though their arguments lacked complexity, possibly due to their weaker language ability. There were also various factors that affected their decisions to participate in the group debate, for instance, group composition, rapport among team members and competitiveness. However, as the observation was only made of two students and there was a very high probability of a chance occurrence, these preliminary results should be interpreted carefully. Nevertheless, they could form the basis for an extensive investigation on the ability of lower proficiency

students, especially in mixed ability classes, to contribute meaningfully to debates in order to further substantiate the benefits of debate as a teaching tool in the EFL, ESL and EAP contexts.

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Ediyanto Liu has extensive experience teaching General English, College English, and academic IELTS courses in China. He is currently an EAP tutor at XJTLU.

[ediyanto.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:ediyanto.liu@xjtlu.edu.cn)



# Writing Correction Techniques at an English Medium University in China: What Works Best?

By Tim Wallis, Debra Jones & Yang Xu

*There has been much controversy regarding the effectiveness of error correction in improving students' writing but research to date is inconclusive, while the question of teacher and student perceptions of feedback has received little attention. As a contribution to this debate, a year-long research project is currently being conducted at a Sino-British university in Suzhou, China. The study combines an analysis of student and teacher perceptions of written corrective feedback with a longitudinal study of error density in student writing. In the first stage, teacher and student attitudes to feedback were evaluated using questionnaire and focus group data. In stage two, five different forms of grammar feedback will be compared in terms of their effectiveness in reducing fossilized errors commonly produced by Chinese speaking students. At an interim stage of the project, this paper reviews current literature on written corrective feedback then discusses the findings regarding teacher and student beliefs and experiences of feedback on writing.*

## Introduction

The issue of written corrective feedback (WCF) has generated much discussion since Truscott claimed there was no evidence that WCF had any positive effect on students' writing and may even be harmful (1996). This view was challenged by Ferris (1999) who argued in favour of WCF but called for more research into its efficacy. Since then, a considerable body of research has been generated in an attempt to answer the question: does error correction help L2 students become better writers? While it is not possible to disprove Truscott, based on empirical studies to date, it seems that the evidence in favour of grammar correction outweighs the evidence against (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Van Beuningen, 2010; Ferris, Liu, Sinha & Senna, 2013). Consequently, the focus has shifted from *whether* WCF is effective to *how best* to use grammar feedback to help students improve their writing. Here, the results are far from conclusive. As a contribution to this ongoing debate, a one-year research project is being conducted at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), an English-medium university in Suzhou, with the following aims:

1. To investigate and identify possible gaps in the perceptions of students and teachers

with regard to written corrective feedback.

2. To compare the relative effectiveness of five different methods of error correction in improving accuracy through text revision over the course of a semester.
3. To explore whether error correction is more effective for addressing some grammatical errors more than others, or if certain correction techniques are more effective for addressing particular errors.

This article will briefly summarize current literature and then present the findings of the first stage of the study; an investigation into the perceptions of students and teachers regarding feedback on student writing.

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical background*

The theoretical arguments surrounding WCF are based on whether error correction aids language acquisition or interlanguage development in the long term as opposed to simply helping students make revisions to a text. Truscott (1996) cited a number of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories which do not support error correction as a tool of language development including Krashen (1981, 1982) and Pienemann (1989), who both

maintained that learners acquire grammatical features in strict order, so can only be expected to master forms they are developmentally ready to acquire, which suggests feedback on forms not yet acquired would not be helpful. Truscott (1996) also highlighted the differences between real learning versus pseudo-learning, also referred to by Ellis (1993; 1994 cited in Truscott, 1996) as implicit versus explicit knowledge; by Krashen (1985) as learning versus acquisition and by Schwartz (1986, cited in Truscott, 1996) as knowledge versus competence. Truscott argues that noticing errors is intuitive and based on implicit linguistic knowledge, while error correction draws on explicit knowledge and thus leads to short-term pseudo-learning rather than genuine language acquisition. In other words, the corrected form is not integrated into students' language system, which explains why students tend to repeat the same mistakes in future writing, even though they can successfully correct the error when revising their work.

On the other hand, Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt 1990; 2001, cited in van Beuningen, 2010) argues that learners need to notice the gap between their output and that of L1 speakers. WCF can help students achieve this and lead to a restructuring of their interlanguage grammar, thus aiding their language development. Similarly, Swain's Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995, cited in van Beuningen, 2010) insists that linguistic output allows students to test linguistic hypotheses about target language grammar and WCF can provide crucial feedback on these hypotheses, helping students to notice gaps in their interlanguage system.

### *Empirical evidence*

Early (pre-1999) studies on WCF cited by Truscott and Ferris were limited in number and suffered from design flaws or inconsistencies making it difficult to generalize findings (see Ferris, 1999; 2004). Following a call for more controlled, comparable, replicable studies (Ferris, 1999; 2004), further research has been conducted and a growing body of evidence suggests WCF does help L2 writers to improve their writing and language development over time (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Van Beuningen, 2010; Ferris et al., 2013). Consequently,

research now is focused on how to use WCF more effectively to improve student writing. Areas of interest include:

- Direct versus indirect feedback
- Comparing different types of indirect feedback e.g. error codes versus underlining
- The merits of selective versus comprehensive feedback
- Whether different types of error require different feedback techniques. For example some researchers have made the distinction between 'treatable' or rule-governed errors as opposed to 'untreatable' errors such as prepositions which are more idiosyncratic.

Ferris et. al. (2013), in a summary of research findings to date, identified three areas of broad agreement based on the literature, although it could be argued even these are by no means conclusively proven:

1. Selective (focused) WCF may be more valuable than comprehensive (unfocused). While it is true that many studies report the positive effects of selective feedback (Lyster, 2004; Ellis et al., 2006, as cited in van Beuningen, 2010), there has been little research into the benefits of comprehensive feedback, although a few studies suggest it can be beneficial to SLA (van Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2008; 2012). Very few studies have directly compared selective and comprehensive feedback (Ellis et al., 2008; Sheen, et al., 2009, as cited in van Beuningen, 2010). Consequently, the superiority of selective feedback is still unproven.
2. Indirect WCF can help long term writing improvement but direct WCF may help language acquisition, especially with low level learners. Intuitively, language teachers might regard indirect feedback as more effective because it supports "guided learning and problem solving" (Lalande, 1982, p. 140). On the other hand, direct correction helps students to test linguistic hypotheses (Swain, 1995, cited in van Beuningen, 2010) and reduces confusion (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). Research results are contradictory, with some studies (Lalande, 1982; Ferris & Helt, 2000; Abedi, Latifi & Moinzadeh, 2010) finding more advantages to indirect feedback and others



- favouring direct correction (Chandler, 2003; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; van Beuningen et al., 2012).
3. Explicit indirect feedback (error codes) seems to be more effective than unlabeled (underlining), particularly with learners exposed to formal grammar instruction (Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Ferris, 2006; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008). However, some research (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986; Ferris et al., 2000, cited in Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) has shown no difference between the two methods.

The results of studies to date suggest a need for further research into how best to use WCF to improve both student writing and language development. In addition, there has been a lack of qualitative research in this area. Some studies have mentioned student attitudes to feedback (Chandler, 2003; Lee, 2005; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) but the issue of teacher perceptions has been under-researched and few studies have compared teacher/student attitudes towards WCF or examined possible gaps in perceptions.

### **An investigation into students' and teachers' beliefs regarding different approaches to WCF**

The major aim of the first stage of the research project has been to compare the perceptions of students and teachers with regard to written corrective feedback.

#### *Methodology*

179 year one Chinese university students completed questionnaires about their perceptions of feedback techniques experienced in high school and university English classes. These questionnaires were designed to collect data regarding student experience of different feedback techniques, their understanding of its purpose, and their use of teachers' suggestions. Eighteen students were then invited to participate in two recorded focus groups for more in-depth discussion, based on areas of interest raised in the questionnaires.

In order to understand Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University Language Centre tutors'

perceptions regarding WCF, and to consider where these perceptions differed from those of students, volunteers were invited to attend one of two 60 minute focus groups. The first group consisted of seven native English speakers from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. The second group comprised eight Chinese teachers of English, most with studying and/or teaching experience in English speaking countries. All were working as EAP tutors in the Language Centre at XJTLU. These recorded focus group discussions were framed to respond to the issues raised by the students, as well as to explore different teachers' beliefs and practices.

#### Results and discussion

##### *Students' perceptions - questionnaires and focus groups*

Regarding the correction techniques experienced in high schools, underlining was the most common (reported by 95.5% of students). Other frequently used techniques included direct correction, whole-class feedback, general comments and face-to-face feedback, while error codes (20.2%) and computer-based (3.9%) feedback were not widespread.

In year one at XJTLU, students also experienced a wide range of feedback techniques including underlining, codes, general comments, computer-based feedback, face-to-face, whole class and direct feedback. According to the students, the biggest differences to their experiences at school were the use of error codes and computer-based feedback.

When asked how they dealt with feedback, the vast majority (87.1%) reported that they read both comments and corrections. Almost two thirds of respondents would revise texts using feedback. In addition, just over one third would contact teachers to discuss feedback or to receive more. Two students commented "I make notes when I see some repeated mistakes" and "I think about why I make the mistakes and try to avoid them next time."

Almost half the respondents considered face-to-face feedback to be most useful. Suggestions included "It gives me more chances to clarify meanings" and "I can

understand teachers' meanings more clearly". The focus groups also reacted positively towards face-to-face feedback. For example, it was thought to motivate "lazy" students who were often unwilling to make corrections. In addition, some tutors tend to combine face-to-face feedback with written feedback to improve clarity.

As for the main purpose of feedback, most students thought the purpose was to "correct mistakes". Significantly, more students indicated "improving structure and organization" than "improving grammar". Less than one third of the respondents thought the purpose was to improve future texts. A typical attitude is illustrated by one interviewee: "I think teachers' feedback is mainly for the current text and the future writing is my responsibility." It seems that students think feedback is only meant to be used between drafts of the same assignment instead of being carried forward to future work. However, most students (78.7%) agreed that it was up to them to use tutor feedback to improve their writing, suggesting most students accept they are responsible for their texts.

When asked about direct and indirect feedback, students generally preferred indirect feedback as they enjoyed "solving problems" using error codes. However, two students preferred direct feedback. One was often uncertain about the corrections and the other thought it was the teacher's responsibility to correct mistakes.

### **Teachers' perceptions** - *focus groups*

Both the native speaker and the Chinese EAP tutor group sessions started with an exploration of the different correction techniques employed. The list was long and largely similar for the two groups, with error codes and general comments the most common methods. Other techniques mentioned included underlining, direct correction, conferencing, whole class feedback, smiley faces and individualized feedback.

Both groups discussed at length to what extent error correction feedback is effective. Most had some reservations about its usefulness, with concerns that it distracted attention from content and structure. Consensus seemed to indicate it was useful if

focused on a limited range of achievable aims.

The researchers were interested in identifying any gap between what tutors expect students to do with error correction feedback, and what students actually do. One tutor suggested that teachers have no real idea about how students use feedback, if they do at all: "Do they make changes between drafts? If so, do they remember?" Teachers wondered if their expectations are realistic "or do we expect miracles?" It was generally agreed that feedback is most likely to be of practical benefit, at least for the text being worked on, if drafts and feedback are returned in class time, and time is allocated for students to work on reacting to the teacher's observations. The experience of both focus groups indicates that students find it very difficult to transfer feedback to future written work; that is, to feed forward. Students tend to think of feedback as being related only to the present text, so they want direct guidance or even direct correction. On the other hand, teachers want students to self-critique.

In line with current research, the focus groups largely agreed with one teacher's view that selective feedback is more effective than correcting every error: "Correcting every mistake is overwhelming for students and teachers. We should accept that students will make many mistakes". Teachers agreed on the value of concentrating on achievable goals, such as subject-verb agreement, and on the importance of positive as well as negative comments. Individualised feedback was also discussed with some students capable and willing to deal with more input than others. This relates to a teacher/student perception gap, with teachers generally believing that 'less is more' while students just want 'more'; especially regarding grammar.

Staff and students seemed largely in agreement that conferencing is effective. Most tutors in the focus groups conduct small group or individual tutorials in class. Others make office hours available for individual consultations although these tend to have limited take-up, with only the more conscientious students attending. Weak students were defended by one teacher as they may want to respond to feedback but do not know how. It was generally agreed that both in-class and office-conferencing, require

students to come armed with a number of specific queries and have a fixed time limit.

### Conclusion

This paper has introduced the initial findings of an ongoing qualitative study into teacher and student perceptions of written corrective feedback at XJTLU. While there is broad agreement, particularly in terms of WCF's usefulness in improving a text and the effectiveness of conferencing, there are also differences in perceptions. Possibly the most important is teachers' largely unfulfilled hope that students will use the WCF to improve future writing. It was interesting that a number of tutors assumed their students would prefer direct correction, though this was not borne out by the students' comments. In addition, there appears to be a discrepancy regarding the benefits of selective feedback, with students wanting more feedback than many tutors consider to be useful.

This project also attempts to address a number of current issues in relation to WCF through a quantitative study of the effects of five different feedback techniques on error density in student writing. In the next stage of the study, five texts will be collected from ninety Chinese students in five different year one classes. Error density will be analysed between first and final drafts to ascertain if one form of feedback is more effective in helping students make revisions. In addition, a longitudinal study over the course of one semester will evaluate the relative merits of each technique in terms of longer term language development. In accordance with current literature, the researchers have chosen to give feedback selectively, focusing on five

errors commonly made by Chinese students. It is hoped the findings will make a positive contribution to the growing body of research in this field in order to inform current practice and enhance student learning.

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**Tim Wallis** arrived in China in 2009, first of all at UNNC but since 2012 he has been teaching EAP at XJTLU. He has an M.A. in Applied Linguistics and has participated in conferences in Portugal, Spain, UK and Turkey, as well as in China.

tim.wallis@xjtlu.edu.cn



**Debra Jones** taught English at university level in Japan for eight years before taking up her current post at XJTLU. She has an MA in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests include feedback on student writing and using feedback to develop independent learning.

debra.jones@xjtlu.edu.cn

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Yang Xu currently works at XJTLU, where she teaches EAP on the Year 1 undergraduate programme. She obtained an MA in TESOL in 2010.

yang.xu@xjtlu.edu.cn



# English Names and Chinese Learners

By Anthony Steward

If names are not correct, language will not be in accordance with the truth of things.

From *The Analects of Confucius*, Book 13, Verse 3

It is now a widespread practice for Chinese students of English to adopt an English<sup>1</sup> name and this article will examine how and why the students choose their names within the context of today's increasingly globalised world. It will also discuss how names can affect the learner, the teacher and the classroom.

Chinese names are constructed using two elements. The first is the family name or "xing". In China, there are 100 family names, used by just under 90% of the population. Typically, this name is monosyllabic, represented by a single character. The second element is the "ming", the given name that can be one or two syllables long. One of these syllables may be shared by siblings or close relatives of the same gender and generation in a family, although it has been reported that this practice has declined recently in mainland China because it has been seen to be related to "patriarchal feudalism" (Feng and Heng, 1983). In contrast with many European naming practices, the family name is placed first in Chinese, followed by the given name. A second important difference is that Chinese names can be constructed, in theory at least, from any characters – there are no words set aside exclusively for use as given names, unlike, for

example, "Anthony" or "Diana". Chinese parents will take great care in the choice of the "ming" name as meaning is paramount, and this can contrast with Western parents who may be more concerned with other features of a name and not semantics.

There are a number of reasons for Chinese students choosing to adopt an English name. Scollon and Scollon (1995) note that there are strict and complex protocols for using names in Chinese society and breaches of these protocols can cause face problems threatening either party's status by amplifying an ambiguity in the relationship. Students might choose an English name for the benefit of their foreign teachers who may be unaware of the complexities involved in using Chinese names. In addition, Chinese is a tonal language; Mandarin has four tones and the Cantonese variety has seven, and a change in tone will change the meaning of a syllable (Y'ung and Pollard, 1982). A foreign teacher using the wrong tones in pronouncing a student's name could have several consequences from a lack of response from the student to causing embarrassment to the student. A common reason given by many Chinese adopters of English names is that they wish to assist the

<sup>1</sup>An "English" name in the context of this discussion will be a name chosen by students that is not necessarily considered a conventional name within western naming practices.

foreigner by providing them with a more easily pronounceable name—a suitable strategy to avoid potential problems caused by non-Chinese speakers. This reasoning may also counter a dichotomy that Li (1997) reports: the conflict an individual may face in having to choose an English name while feeling that its use might pose a threat to their cultural or racial identity.

At this point, it is worth noting that when addressing Chinese teachers, students normally use one of a number of honorifics, denoting the teacher's status, as well as the teacher's family name. From personal observation, many foreign teachers tell students to address them by their given names. If the students also use an English name, this will suggest a different student-teacher relationship. Between Chinese teacher and Chinese student, there is a clear hierarchy with the use of the deferential honorific emphasizing the power of the teacher and distance between the two parties. In the case of the foreign teacher and student both using less formal names, the relationship will still be hierarchical but ameliorated by a narrowing of the distance and lessening of the power dimension, at least on the surface. Edwards (2006) suggests this is actually more democratic, establishing equilibrium in classrooms where communicative teaching practices are being pursued. However, more evidence might be required to prove this assertion.

While many teachers will encourage students to take an English name, few seem to think it should be mandatory. This imposition of a name could have negative consequences, both in the classroom and on the student's attitude to learning the language. Assuming a new name can bring a language learner into a new community; the new identity this membership endows should act as a positive motivator. Enforced naming could both reinforce resistance to learning and pose a threat to the student's existing cultural identity. Thompson (2006) suggests that both language learners and immigrants face complex choices when faced with taking a new name. These are associated with the individual's construction of several identities and investment in a number of communities of practice.

Throughout this paper, the new names will be described as "English". This is because as

well as selecting conventional names, many Chinese students adopt a range of names from the colourful to what might be considered bizarre. McPherron (2009) identified five categories for describing the students' choice of a name. Some names are based on their Chinese names, either through meaning or sound; secondly, they may identify a personality trait or future ambition; thirdly, they may be taken from personalities; fourthly, they can be newly created names; and finally, they may be chosen from lists or supplied by a teacher. As Lee (2001) notes, some names are also chosen to express individuality, playfulness and creativity. Occasionally, students choose names that may cause teachers to intervene. One student chose "Liquid Luck". Although a seemingly implausible choice, it appears in a "Harry Potter" novel as a potion that can bring good fortune. This student has since adopted another name. "Adolph" chose his name based on rather limited knowledge of the associations it carries. Many male students choose names of basketball or football players (Kobe, Beckham or Rooney being popular choices), while others use characters in computer games. Again, teachers may initially be surprised by the selection but subsequent investigation can often reveal the importance of these names to the students.

Adoption of English names is not a universal practice throughout Asia. Although many Chinese are willing to take an English name, Silver and Shiomi (2010) point out that this is not so with Japanese students. This may be because, according to Sugimoto (1997), the Japanese have a strong belief that their country is unique and therefore are perhaps more resistant to adding to their identity. Silver and Shiomi suggest the Chinese are more accepting of English names because of the use of English as a lingua franca and, as Kirkpatrick (2007) notes, it is perceived as a passport to social and economic improvement. From anecdotal evidence from other teachers, it appears that the practice of adopting an English name is more prevalent in China than other countries in the region.

Writing on identity, culture and critical pedagogy, Hinkel (2005) suggests that notions of identity and culture are in a constant state of change in response to evolving social status and education, shifts in ideology and reflecting

political and historical legacies. This can account for students changing their English names, particularly at times of transition. There may be a realization that a name used in an EFL setting may not be as appropriate in an ESL classroom. This may happen when a student moves from China to a university abroad, moving from one speech community to another, and re-identifying themselves to adapt to their new environment.

In China, the students will have shared identities in terms of age, ethnicity, language and social attitudes. Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) will, almost by definition, have little in common with their students and both must work to overcome uncertainties and create a positive learning environment. By adopting new names, at least for use in the classroom, the students will have taken a conscious step to creating a new, albeit artificially constructed, community. For teachers, tolerance of the variety of names would signal their acceptance of the students' right to create their own new identities and this should contribute to the evolution of a new community embracing every member of the classroom. However, students should also be warned of the possibility of an inappropriate name causing embarrassment. Teachers should be aware that even though their status in the classroom is not disputed, imposition of names could be seen as hostile, an external threat to the group. Equally, as Dornyei and Murphy (2003) stress, it is important for teachers to know and address the students by their names – this also reinforces the sense of community. By creating a new identity, students can be seen to be taking a positive interest in their target language community, described by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as an “integrative orientation”.

An informal survey was carried out in March 2012 in a class of first-year students at a joint-venture university in Eastern China. Fourteen students gave written responses to ten questions about their English names. Most had adopted English names before entering the university, one-third having had these names for at least ten years. Only two students reported that they were required to take names by their teachers and another two reported that they did so because of peer influence in high school. One of the girls, Laura,

mandated to take the name by her teacher, admitted she was, and still is, totally unaware of her name's meaning although she had been using it for ten years. Tibby, who chose her name while in primary school from a character in the film *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, did so because “most students in my class had one English name, and having a name in other languages was a kind of fashion” adding: “I really liked the role Tibby, and my friend told me that that girl Tibby in the movie and I had a lot of similarities.” She also uses this name on social media sites. She mentioned liking the name because she felt it is easy to pronounce and spell, and surprisingly, “my Chinese name is a little difficult to pronounce, many people (including my Chinese teacher in elementary school) even don't know (sic) how to pronounce my family name.” She also gave the most forthright response to a question about the use of English names in English classes: “I got a feeling like ‘I am communicating with the native speakers!’ It's a little difficult to describe, just like being involved...In a word, it will be good if my English name is used in class.” This seems to indicate that she does feel as if she has membership of the particular community that should exist in the language classroom.

Like Tibby, all but one of the students use social media. Several said that they used the same English name for their online identity but just over half chose other names, often a different name, either Chinese or non-Chinese, for each social website they subscribed to. None of the students felt their online names were more important than their real-life English name and all but one said they would never stop using their English name. Most would keep it because they saw it as being useful in communicating with foreigners, especially if they were to study abroad or conduct business internationally. The one student who saw his new name as transitory observed: “If one day I don't need to use English any more, I will stop using it”. He appeared to be the least accepting of the class of an English name, only taking one during his first term at university and choosing, at his parents' suggestion, a name that sounded like his Chinese name. Over half the students in fact chose single or two syllable names that reflected the structure of the syllable in Mandarin Chinese (Ross & Ma, 2006), that of

an initial consonant and a final - names such as Cathy, Vicky and Maggie.

Overall, the responses from this group of students bore out the pragmatic reasons discussed earlier for taking an English name. Communicating with teachers, use in English-language classrooms and contact with foreign friends were the predominant reasons, but many of the students also saw the name as an investment for their future. For Katherine, “a name can be a symbol of each person. It is necessary for us to have an English name as English has been (sic) widely used all over the world.” The students perhaps reflect the growing awareness in China of the nation’s role in the world and the need for individuals to develop global identities.

A sampling of Chinese students in late 2013 who were spending their final undergraduate years at a British university yielded some interesting results, some going counter to expectations. Out of one hundred responses monitored, only fifteen had modified their English names after arriving in the U.K., while others had retained their original, and still somewhat exotic, names such as Vager, Barbossa and Pope. Identity seems to have played an important role with some like Haki, Kuroki and Yuqing retaining their names, while David, Veronica and May changed to Vector, Fay and Dan because they reported these new names felt more Chinese even if it meant, as in May’s case, adopting a name more associated with another gender. In all these cases, it seems retaining a measure of oriental identity in an occidental environment was preferable to assimilation.

A number of reasons were given for making changes, from the realization that the old name (Perfect) was “weird” and might make its owner “a laughing stock”, to the adoption of a new name (Katrina) in order to reflect the transition to a new country and a new life. Echo was retired because of its association with a local newspaper, and Dennis became Nathan partly because the former name had been imposed by an English teacher (presumably a NEST) back in China and the new name was in honour of a favourite TV show character as well as in celebration of a new experience. The students were not asked to report at what stage they decided to change their names and it may well be that several of the respondents will “re-brand” themselves in

the future. The need to retain a sense of “Chinese-ness” is perhaps for many an act of cultural solidarity within the group when confronted by a very alien environment, perhaps reflecting the stage of culture shock that follows the initial honeymoon period described by both Oberg (1960) and Brown (1980).

Finally, it should be noted there has been little research into the value of the use of English names by Chinese learners. It does appear that the voluntary adoption of these names may be of value to the individual in helping build multiple new identities, and also in protecting existing identities and removing potential barriers in communication between non-Chinese teachers and their students. This also contributes to the narrowing of what Schumann (as cited in Holliday et al., 2010) described as the social distance between the learners and the target language personified in the teacher, creating greater solidarity between the two parties and facilitating acquisition of the target language. Future surveys might yield more data regarding students’ perceptions of how a new name could contribute to a change in attitude in the classroom. The issue of the teacher’s name might also be a fruitful topic to research as some might feel that a NEST teaching in China should adopt a Chinese name to show solidarity with the students, whereas others could argue that all names in the classroom should be English in order to establish a single communal identity.

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**Anthony Steward** is currently an English Tutor at XJTU. He has an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL but spent most of his working life in television news before entering the teaching profession.

[anthony.steward@utoronto.ca](mailto:anthony.steward@utoronto.ca)

# Google Scholar: What is it and why should I care?

By Eoin Jordan & Peter McConnell

Technology, as used for English language education in a Chinese context, has received attention in past issues of *English Teaching in China* (ETiC) through research reports (Crofts & Kaczor, 2012; Jordan & Crofts, 2012), reflective articles (Pierrel, 2013), and regular website reviews. Here, we continue with the theme of technology, but this time from the perspective of China-based English language teachers' professional development. More specifically, this article is concerned with an academic search engine called Google Scholar (GS) (Google Inc., 2013a). Academic articles from ETiC have recently become searchable on GS, so it seems timely to provide readers with more information about this tool, as well as to highlight its possible usefulness for teachers' professional development and for the development of journals such as this one. The first two sections below provide an overview of what GS is and how it works, while the final section puts forward three reasons why GS may be of interest to readers of both ETiC and other journals.

## What is Google Scholar?

GS is a search engine that can be used to search the full text of academic articles from all over the web. It searches a large number of journal and article repositories, including individual author websites, independent

journal websites such as ETiC, subscription-based journal aggregators such as JSTOR, and a growing number of university libraries. The publications indexed by GS span virtually every academic and scientific discipline and include most major world languages, with English-language journals such as *Nature* and *The Lancet* being the most frequently cited (Google Inc., 2013b). With a basic understanding of how GS works, students, teachers, academics, and research professionals alike may find it to be an invaluable research tool. Indeed, recent research suggests that it is now widely used at academic institutions (Wang & Howard, 2012), and that its coverage is sufficient for systematic reviews of medical literature (Gehanno, Rollin, & Darmoni, 2013).

## How does Google Scholar find articles?

GS indexes articles from around the web with the use of automatic software. This software, often referred to as a "crawler", "robot" or "bot", begins by looking for a specific file type, such as .HTML or .PDF (Google Inc., 2013c). The crawler will then parse the information in that document in order to determine whether or not it is a scholarly publication. For example, it will look for a title in large type followed by author names in smaller type at the top of the first page, as well as a full citation for the article in the header or footer of that first page.

The search bot will also examine the end of the article for a heading such as ‘References’ or ‘Bibliography’ and a numbered reference list in one of the major referencing styles (Google Inc., 2013c).

Parsing a publication’s reference list for bibliographic data is another important aspect of GS’s functionality, as the bots will use the information in each article’s reference list for ranking its search results. In other words, if an article has been frequently or recently cited by other authors in Google’s index, that article will be ranked as more relevant in search results (Google Inc., 2013a). Articles for the first three issues of ETiC can be found on GS using the search term “XJTLU ETiC”, although they do not rank highly in other searches at present, owing to their current lack of citations.

Why should I care?

We believe there are three main reasons why readers of, and contributors to, ETiC (and other journals) should be interested in GS and ETiC’s recent presence on it:

1. Firstly, as GS is a freely available search engine with extensive registered content, teachers may find it a useful tool for researching the efficacy of different teaching approaches, as well as for finding resources for teaching, such as word lists. For instance, if considering whether or not to use a jigsaw reading activity in class, teachers could search on GS using the term “jigsaw reading” to see information on studies using this technique. While some of the information linked may require an institutional login to access the full text, abstracts are usually freely available, and there are a significant number of resources that are free to download in their entirety. As mentioned in the previous section, the ranking of articles is based in part on the number of times they have been cited, so the hits near the top of the page are likely to be considered reliable sources within the scholarly community. GS also has options to search only for papers published in the last few years, which can help teachers to ensure that they are looking at recent research.
2. A second benefit of GS to research-active teachers is that it allows authors to share their work quickly and easily. As noted in the previous section, articles are located by GS through an automated process, rather than through peer review by experts in a field. Therefore, if a teacher uploads an academic research paper they have completed to their institutional web page or repository, this will likely become searchable on GS a few weeks after its upload (Google Inc, 2013c). While concerns about quality have been raised regarding GS’s inclusion of non-peer reviewed material (Aguillo, 2012), this system does also provide greater opportunity for new or minor areas of research to be shared easily and quickly. If the paper is then cited by others on GS, it will likely feature more prominently in search results. Authors of papers are also able to check online to see how many times their paper has been cited, as well as who has cited it.
3. The final benefit we will discuss here is the potential for GS to raise the profile of new journals such as ETiC. With minimal effort, an independent publication can provide GS-searchable content online, resulting in its articles becoming more accessible to other professionals around the world. If these articles are cited, their prominence in search results will be improved. With this in mind, journals may increase their visibility by encouraging authors to build on articles from previous issues, which will help to raise the prominence of those articles within GS search results, as well as provide continuity in the areas covered by the journal. If ETiC, for example, becomes more visible on GS, this seems likely to result in increased numbers of submissions, and therefore a wider range of voices being heard regarding issues relevant to English teaching in China. Indeed, readers may have noticed that this article builds on the technology theme in previous articles, and cites three previous contributions to ETiC.

## Conclusion

We hope that the discussion in this article has provided readers with some new insights about GS and its possible uses. It is also hoped that future contributors to ETIC will consider building on work published in previous issues, for the reasons outlined above.

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**Eoin Jordan** currently holds the position of Year 1 Manager in XJTLU's Language Centre. His research interests include CALL, blended learning, World Englishes, and vocabulary acquisition and testing.

eoin.jordan@xjtlu.edu.cn



**Peter McConnell** has been a tutor in the Language Centre at XJTLU since 2010. His interests include CALL, design, and the relationship between technology and learner autonomy.

peter.mcconnell@xjtlu.edu.cn



# Book Review: the small big picture book of english grammar

By Jonathan English



Author: K.A. Kyriacou

Illustrations: Noemi Moauro (inspired by Isabella Andrea Kyriacou)

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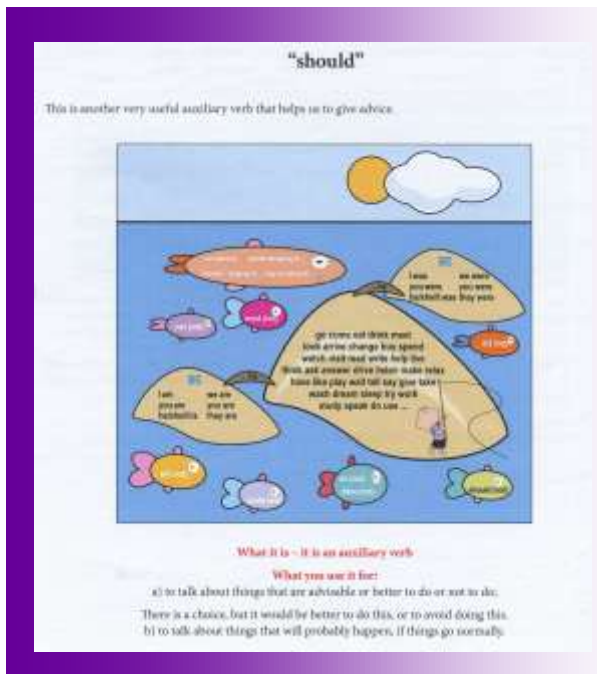
Pages: 143 (including Appendix)

English grammar obviously encompasses far more than just verb tenses/forms, but that is undoubtedly the area that first springs to the mind of any teacher-practitioner when “grammar” is mentioned. It likewise goes without saying that a sound grasp of the essential principles of the verb system, along with the ability to apply them appropriately and accurately enough for effective communication, is fundamental to achieving linguistic competency at any level of language learning.

One of the leading guides in the field is undoubtedly Scott Thornbury’s *How to Teach Grammar*, in which he sets out an “E-factor (economy, ease and efficacy)” and “A-factor (appropriacy, which includes learners’ attitudes and expectations)” (1999, p. 25-27). Kyriacou’s *the small big picture book of english grammar* is clearly targeted at a young readership (it is in fact dedicated to his daughter, who is also credited with having inspired the illustrations) and heavily focused on verbs. That said, it is arguably suitable for a wider audience who are at an approximately elementary level in their English learning, particularly those students who may have (to some extent) a preferred “visual learning style” (Herzfeld-Pipkin, 2006), and does also consider comparatives/superlatives.

Kyriacou’s book commences at the outset

by assuring the learner that “This book will help you to understand English grammar... simplify it very much and look at grammar separated onto different islands ... help you to see how English works and all the confusion ... will disappear” (p. 13). The verb system is then visually represented in terms of a series of “islands” (starting with the “be” island), progressing through a series of units until the student has built up an archipelago. For instance, by p. 53 (i.e. the page pictured on the front cover above), the “be” islands (i.e.



present simple and past simple forms of “be” respectively) are connected (here, with the progressive aspect “-ing”) to the “present simple” island, and surrounded by various “fish” (which the learner “fishes out of the sea” to help them progress), including the “be going to” auxiliary forms (listed by like pattern subjects, i.e. “I, you/we”, etc.), and “can” and “could”, “do/does” and “did”, and “will” (plus their negative forms). Certain modal verbs (e.g. “should”, which has multiple applications in English (e.g. recommendation, prediction, obligation), have been portrayed both as “fish” (e.g. on p. 56) and also as “ships” which “look forward/backward” when further uses are considered (e.g. “should [not] have” on p. 122).

It is clear that a dedicated teacher could develop from *the small big picture book of english grammar* physical materials to accommodate (to use Herzfield-Pipkin’s (2006) terminology) the more “kinaesthetic/tactile learner”, possibly combining it with drilling exercises to include “auditory learners”, and thereby compensate for those difficulties that many students seem to experience with certain otherwise highly credible texts at beginner/elementary level. Despite incorporating various pictures and other visual aids, many grammar exercise books arguably remain too focused on textual-analytical learning. This also tends to be an issue with various lower-level integrated skills books which, despite being replete with colourful images and listening and speaking exercises, often evidently pre-suppose a quite

high literacy level and ability to cope with grammatical metalanguage.

That is not to say that *the small big picture book of english grammar* completely avoids all metalanguage, but a concerted effort has apparently been made to introduce such terminology in a relatively unobtrusive manner, such that the learner may become familiar and comfortable with rather than daunted by it. Similarly (*per* Benson’s (1999) criteria), the consistent ethos appears to be to try and provide explanations resulting in understanding, accompanied by appropriate quality and quantity of text. The key to such understanding is what Michael Lewis (1986), in his seminal work *The English verb – an Exploration of Structure and Meaning*, terms “conceptualization” (of the situation or event) in the mind of the writer/speaker. The educator’s role is thus to impart a set of “fundamental truths”, i.e. reliable guidelines on the basis of which the language learner is consequently empowered to make, with a degree of confidence, informed and intelligent choices.

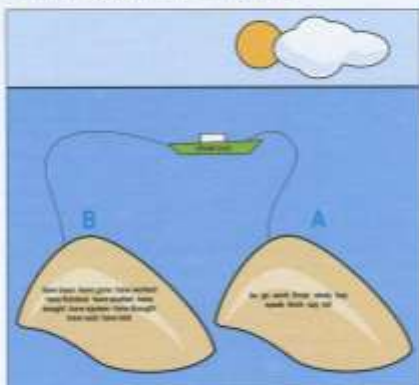
Lewis (1986) would probably be somewhat displeased at, for example, “will” being labelled as “the simple future” by Kyriacou (p. 21), but would no doubt be gratified by the immediately-following explanation that if “will” is placed upon any verb on the “the present simple island”, this results in a “usable future for normal verbs” and the caveat that “There are other ways of speaking about the future, but this is the easiest for now”. Lewis (1986) *inter alia* emphasizes that it is extremely unhelpful to language learners (and in fact quite untrue) to describe the English verb system as “complicated”, replete with irregularities, “sometimes rules” and numerous exceptions to the rule.

There is likewise plenty of text in *the small big picture book of english grammar*, and of a type familiar to any teacher who has used, for example, Raymond Murphy’s (2007) *Essential Grammar in Use* at this level, with features such as verb tables and practice exercises which are clearly designed to consolidate a particular lexico-grammatical pattern. While it is possible to criticise such exercises as being artificial and contrived, it should also be recognised that the vast majority of such grammar exercises rely on sentences (semantic abstractions) rather than utterances (such as

#### forms that look at now, the future and back – “should”

This is a very useful summary that allows us to look forward and backward and comment on what would be advisable for us:

to have done in the past AND do now or in the future  
not to have done in the past AND not to do now or in the future.



So, when we look at now and the future, we say:  
- I should go now, she should study more, they shouldn't smoke, we shouldn't be rude to the teacher, people should save more money, politicians shouldn't be so stupid.  
And when we look back into the past:

are produced in authentic discourse) specifically in order to achieve this aim (Watkins, 2006), and that Kyriacou gives due consideration to realistic uses of English (e.g. contracted forms).

One similar book to *the small big picture book of english grammar* that did incorporate authentic discourse (e.g. extracts from instruction manuals) was David Maule's (1991) *The English Verb – the Meaning of the English Verb Tenses*, but the similarities between Maule's and Kyriacou's works far outweigh the differences. Maule incorporated *inter alia* visuals such as Venn diagrams to explain the English verb system, and dedicated his work to his parents (native French speakers), from whom he learned English grammar. In the final analysis, Kyriacou's *small big picture book of english grammar* likewise incorporates a refreshing and innovative approach to teaching English grammar at lower levels.

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**Jonathan English** (MA in Applied Linguistics & TEFL) has extensive international teaching experience (including EAP, ESAP and ESP at all levels), and currently teaches at XJTLU (an international university in China). His professional interests include innovative approaches to explicit grammar instruction, as well as materials development, syllabus design, and assessment.

jonathan.english@xjtlu.edu.cn

# Insites

By 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 resources for developing oral English.*

## English Central

<http://www.englishcentral.com>



It can be difficult to find motivating speaking practice for students outside of class. This site provides an extensive collection of videos for learners to use following the format of “watch, learn, speak, quiz”. Users watch a short video with subtitles and can immediately check unknown vocabulary by clicking any of the words. By using a microphone headset, they can then record themselves repeating the dialogue as they read it on screen. They are given immediate feedback on their pronunciation using a colour coding system which highlights possible pronunciation mistakes of particular words and any sections which were unclear and not heard by the system. Finally, a quiz allows users to test their knowledge of vocabulary used in the video.

The diversity of videos available means that all users are likely to find content of interest.

Videos range from interviews with celebrities and movie trailers, to academic and business topics. As well as searching by topics, users can specify the level (beginner, intermediate and advanced) and use other filters such as “trending” or “most recent” to limit search results. Content is provided in collaboration with other organizations such as Voice of America, National Geographic Learning, and Garnet Education. Over 9000 video lessons are offered with 50 new lessons added every week.

Besides the authentic and wide-ranging video content, the design of the site encourages learners to return regularly. As users need to log in to use the site, every vocabulary item they come across in the videos is tracked; by clicking on “my words” on the menu bar, students can see their complete list of words and corresponding definitions, and then take a quiz to test their knowledge of those words. During the quiz, the word is heard and seen in context; a very short captioned video containing the vocabulary item is played. The student then chooses the correct definition from four options or is asked to spell the word after reading a definition. The personalized vocabulary record tracks progress on each word according to the frequency of successful quiz attempts. For further motivation, users are ranked on a scoreboard in comparison with others according to the points scored by completing video dialogues and quizzes. These



rankings can also be filtered in order to compare with other learners of the same native language.

For lower-level users, navigation of the website is now offered in several languages, including Chinese.

One major drawback of the site is its restrictions on non-paying users. Full access to

the site starts at US\$15 per month and packages are available for institution membership. Nevertheless, it is free for anyone to register and access two video lessons per month.

This is an extensive, yet easy-to-navigate site, providing motivating content for learners of all abilities and interests.

## Okanagan University College: Pronunciation

<http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/>

This website focuses completely on pronunciation and provides a variety of input catering to a range of learning styles. The site is organized according to hard-to-pronounce individual sounds, e.g. /θ/, /ð/, or pairs of sounds which can be confused by learners such as v/w or l/r. The lesson for each sound or pair of sounds is recorded as an MP3 and available with a PDF worksheet which students can download and complete while listening to the lesson. Each lesson provides comprehensive practice of the sound(s) featured, with each recording lasting approximately eight minutes. The lesson includes a description of how the mouth moves to make the sounds, followed by a range of practice activities including listening to and repeating words containing the sound, distinguishing between minimal pairs such as three/free (as both isolated words and in sentences), dictation, and tongue twisters. Also included are pair activities which could be used in class: pair dictation, information gap exercises and practice dialogues. The answer keys to all the lessons are provided in a link at the bottom of the main page.

Further audio-visual resources are provided to help students in forming the sounds: QuickTime movies both illustrate the movement of the mouth as each sound is made and feature teachers giving their own advice on ways to practice the sound in question. Adobe Shockwave Player and a microphone are



required for additional activities which allow learners to listen to a dialogue and record themselves taking on the role of one of the speakers.

Although the basic layout and aesthetics could be made more attractive, and better organized to more clearly show the features available, the site can be recommended as a useful resource for improving pronunciation, suitable for both in-class practice and self-study. Nevertheless, it would be advisable to demonstrate it to learners who may initially find the site difficult to navigate independently.

# Knovio

<http://www.knovio.com/>

This is a website which is particularly valuable for students who have to prepare and deliver presentations. The ability to create a visual record of a presentation is useful for learners as they can reflect on a variety of skills such as pronunciation, intonation, body language, pace and vocabulary. It also allows the teacher an opportunity to give feedback online and present material in a different medium. In addition, it can be used to share information between learners as the completed presentations can be uploaded to social

networking sites, or emailed to individuals.

The site could be used for self-study, or for preparing EAP students in their content courses. Learners could research a topic and then create a presentation which can be accessed by other students online. Learners of Business English could critically analyse and refine specific presentation skills, particularly with regard to delivery. As the presentations and accompanying slides can be uploaded online, or emailed directly to participants, feedback can be given after the presentation and reviewed later to see where improvements have been made.

The slides should be checked for errors before they are uploaded to Knovio as changes cannot be made after this. It is also possible to re-record the video, although the previous presentation is erased. The user has a choice of recording either audio only or making a video using the computer's microphone or webcam.

Although users have to sign up to Knovio, the process is quick and easy. Users can also create private groups where they can share their presentations with others.

The site is well laid-out and has easy-to-follow instructions. The main page has a FAQ section and a feedback option. At present it is a free site, although there are plans to have a premium option, which would charge for use.



**Jackie Hemingway** has taught EAP at XJTLU since September 2011. Prior to joining XJTLU she taught General and Business English in several countries including Austria, Spain, Japan and Oman.

Jacqueline.hemingway@xjtlu.edu.cn



**Sarah Butler** has extensive experience teaching EAP, Business English and young learners. She has taught in various countries including Germany, Oman and China. She has most recently taught at Warwick University and Coventry University.

sarah.butlerelt@gmail.com



# Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on ESP in Asia in conjunction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of the Chinese Association for ESP

**By Debra Jones with contributions from Renate Kirchner, James Lee and Gareth Morris**

The 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on ESP in Asia in conjunction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of the Chinese Association for ESP took place at Fudan University, Shanghai from 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> September, 2013. The theme of the conference, 'ESP in the Context of the Internationalization of Higher Education and Economic Globalization', added an international perspective to a conference primarily attended by teachers currently working in China. The number of participants exceeded 200 for the first time in the conference's history.

Day 1 opened with three plenary sessions where speakers from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan discussed the challenges of developing English communication skills for the era of globalization. The afternoon session consisted of workshops on themes such as genre analysis in the Chinese context, how to assess performance in EAP and ESP, and the on-going debate between the relative effectiveness of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) versus English for General Purposes (EGP), as well as English for General or Specific Academic Purposes

(EGAP versus ESAP). These were the dominant themes of the conference and were discussed at length over the following two days. The evening session focused on ESP in the legal, business and college English contexts.

Day 2 saw parallel presentations organised into broad themes such as curriculum and course design, materials design, testing and assessment, teaching practice and teacher development, English teaching and learning for the workplace, and innovations in research. In total, 180 sessions were scheduled although some were cancelled on the day. Arguably, there were too many sessions packed into one day, leading to audience fatigue and imposing stress on presenters due to the tight timing requirements. Within these broad themes, it is possible to identify a number of areas currently attracting the interest of researchers in China.

Within the theme of Curriculum and Course Design, several presentations focused on making the transition from EGP/EGAP to ESP/ESAP for students in subject areas such as Finance and Architecture, while James Lee and Bin Zou

of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) both spoke more generally about the XJTLU experience of moving towards a subject-specific curriculum and to what extent this had been successful. James Lee suggested that to become better integrated members of their own discourse communities, students should study in detail the relevant genre expectations and language conventions of their discipline, and he also recommended that EAP teachers engage more fully and openly with their subject counterparts in order to deliver effective EAP/ESAP courses.

Within the Testing and Assessment stream, a speaker from the University of Nottingham, Ningbo (UNNC) made the case for using the CEFR as a benchmark for EAP and ESP assessment of university courses while other presenters suggested alternative evaluation models for ESP. One interesting idea, also from UNNC, was the development of ESP rating descriptors using tutor-student feedback comments. Records of tutor feedback from previous years, both formative and summative, are collected and organised and form the basis of a more 'empirically-based' rating scale based on the actual strengths and weaknesses of previous student performance on similar tasks.

Across all the themes, the topic of writing was extensively discussed. Tim Wallis, Yang Xu and Debra Jones presented their findings on student and teacher perceptions on written corrective feedback at XJTLU, suggesting students do not always react to feedback in the way their instructors expect them to (see Wallis, Jones & Xu in this issue). Other presentations highlighted the issues of peer and teacher review.

On the other hand, few presenters addressed the issue of spoken English, suggesting that this area is currently attracting little interest among ESP practitioners in China. Given that the conference focused on internationalisation, it was disappointing that more time was

not devoted to this important aspect of communication in the global era.

As might be expected at an ESP conference, there was a strong focus on English Teaching and Learning for Occupational Purposes. Most of the presentations discussed medical English although other professional fields such as pharmacy and navigation were also considered. More generally, Gareth Morris of XJTLU presented findings from his research into the connection between employment goals and L2 motivation among English majors at a Chinese university and an affiliated college, as well as their attitudes towards their English courses. His results suggested that, irrespective of their year of study, Chinese undergraduate English majors do have employment goals, and, although these tend to lack specificity, employment was still one of the most prominent factors motivating students. In addition, students clearly identified areas in which they felt their degrees could be improved, including greater module choice and flexibility and through being more supportive of their potential future employment needs.

Finally, a diverse range of topics made up the Innovations in ESP Research stream including the intriguingly titled "Towards a Freirean Anti-Banking Language Pedagogy: A Liberating Way of Teaching and Learning Academic English", which presented an alternative to the current test-oriented English curriculum and pedagogy of Chinese College English. A number of presentations in this section focused on vocabulary acquisition, and the XJTLU Language Centre had a strong presence here as well. Wangheng Peng and Bin Zou presented their research on corpus and academic vocabulary while Renate Kirchner introduced the latest results of her on-going study of Chinese Foundation Year students' levels of receptive vocabulary. Her initial research revealed an average vocabulary size of 5,182 words (Kirchner, 2013). The latest findings, amongst

students from a different major, suggest that students' English vocabulary can be extrapolated to be 6,653 words.

As is often the case, sessions with the most quirky titles tended to be the most interesting. In another vocabulary related session titled, "What tells the colour and what the colour tells: a cognitive and cross-cultural perspective" was an interesting insight into the conceptual basis of language. Using colour and colour-related figurative language as an example, presenter Weiyi Chu, also of the XJTLU Language Centre, demonstrated how cultural differences can prevent learners from acquiring vocabulary items which are conceptually different. For instance, English speakers say 'green with envy' as opposed to 'red' in Chinese. The presenter suggested that in order to learn these expressions, L2 learners need to understand their origins.

Meanwhile, anyone who has received an email from a student requesting 'permission' to be absent and wondered how to reply, would have been interested in the session "Students writing to faculty: an analysis of 'absence' emails". The presenters compared "absence" emails sent by native speaker and ESL students at an American university with emails sent by EFL students at a Chinese university. The results showed that native speaker and ESL students employ similar communicative 'moves' such as apology, explanation, suggesting a solution and showing appreciation, and in a similar sequence. Chinese EFL students, on the other hand, showed less understanding of which moves to include and how to sequence them, drawing instead on a formula adopted in communication with Chinese professors which does not necessarily transfer to English. It was suggested that the conventions of email in an academic context need to be taught as students do not instinctively know them.

The plenary sessions on the last morning had very practical classroom applications.

Professor An Cheng from Oklahoma State University gave a step-by-step demonstration of how to use genre analysis with postgraduate students. Later, Professor Youzhong Sun of the Beijing Foreign Studies University gave a detailed account of changes made to a college writing programme based on a sociocultural perspective, attempting to integrate cognitive development alongside language learning. Both sessions provided food for thought for anyone involved in the development of an ESAP or EGAP writing programme.

The final afternoon of the conference was devoted to post-conference workshops, one of which was given by Professor Laurence Anthony from the Centre for English Language Education in Science and Engineering (CELESE) at Waseda University in Japan. The workshop, entitled "Designing, Teaching, and Evaluating ESP Courses in Critical Discussion and Debate: An Example from Science and Engineering", introduced two mandatory English courses delivered as part of a BSc Undergraduate Programme adopting a "4-skills approach". For example, in the case of Academic Lecture Comprehension (ALC), students **listen** to a lecture, **write** notes and a summary of the content, **read** a related article and **discuss** the lecture. The workshop was an interesting and fun experience, requiring the audience to switch roles from teachers to students as they attempted the tasks students would be expected to complete in the ALC class.

In the closing remarks, it was announced that the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on ESP in Asia in conjunction with the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Chinese Association for ESP will be held in Beijing in late Spring 2014 as opposed to Autumn as in previous years. In addition, the formation of a new organisation was announced by Professor Youzhong Sun. The Association for ESP in Greater China plans to hold its first conference in October 2014

in Taiwan. While this development is encouraging for ESP teachers working in Mainland China, it is hoped that these conferences will also attract speakers from overseas to give a more international perspective to the proceedings. Given that one of the stated aims of this year's conference was "to bring together scholars, researchers and practitioners... in China and other parts of the world" (Chinese Foreign Languages Education Association, 2013), the lack of representation from professionals working in other countries compared to previous years was disappointing.

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Debra Jones taught English at university level in Japan for eight years before taking up her current post at XJTLU. She has an MA in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests include feedback on student writing and using feedback to develop independent learning.

debra.jones@xjtlu.edu.cn



# Upcoming Conferences

## Seth Hartigan

### Conferences with Open Proposal Deadlines

*5<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong Association of Applied Linguistics (HAAL) Conference*

June 7, 2014, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Proposal due: March 31, 2014

Website: <http://www.haal.hk/>

*Tri-Institutes for English Language Education (TRI-ELE) 2014*

June 20-21, 2014, Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Proposal due: February 28, 2014

Website: <http://tri-ele.litu.tu.ac.th/>

*British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) Language Learning and Teaching SIG*

July 3-4, 2014, University of Leeds, UK

Proposal due: March 23, 2014

Website: [http://www.baal.org.uk/sig\\_learn\\_teach.html](http://www.baal.org.uk/sig_learn_teach.html)

*9<sup>th</sup> International and 49<sup>th</sup> Annual English Language Teachers' Association of India (ELTAI) Conference*

August 21-23, 2014, VIT University, Jaipur, India

Proposal due: May 31, 2014

Website: <http://www.eltai.in/conference.html>

*7<sup>th</sup> English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Conference*

September 4-6, 2014, The American College of Greece, Athens, Greece

Proposal due: March 1, 2014

Website: <http://english-lingua-franca.org/>

*8<sup>th</sup> Annual International Free Linguistics Conference (FLC) 2014*

September 26-27, 2014, School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China

Proposal due: April 1, 2014

Website: <http://freelinguistics.org/conference/2014>

*7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on English Language Teaching in China (ELT) 2014*

October 23-26, 2014, School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University, Nanjing, China

Proposal due: February 20, 2014

Website: <http://www.celea.org.cn/2014/english>

*Cognitive Linguistics and Pragmatics: Theory and Practice International Conference 2014*

October 24-26, 2014, School of Foreign Languages, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

Proposal due: March 24, 2014

Website: <http://clp.njnu.edu.cn>

*13<sup>th</sup> Symposium on Second Language Writing*

November 13-15, 2014, Arizona State University, USA

Proposal due: June 1, 2014

Website: <http://sslw.asu.edu/2014>

*11<sup>th</sup> Cambodia TESOL (CAMTESOL) 2015*

February 2015, Cambodia

Proposal due: TBD

Website: <http://cantesol.org>

*Sociolinguistics of Globalization: (De)centring and (de)standardization*

June 3-6, 2015, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Proposal due: September 30, 2014

Website: <http://www.english.hku.hk/events/slxg2015>

### Conferences with Closed Proposal Deadlines

*Shantou University English Language Center Conference 2014*

April 25-27, 2014, Shantou, China

Web: <http://elc.stu.edu.cn/conf2014/>

**Japan Association for Language Teaching's (JALT) Task Based Learning SIG 2<sup>nd</sup> Task-Based Language Teaching in Asia Conference**  
 May 17, 2014, Kinki University, Osaka, Japan  
 Website: <http://www.tblsig.org/conference>

**31<sup>st</sup> International Conference on English Teaching and Learning**  
 May 17-18, 2014, Chung Yuan Christian University, Zhongli, Taiwan  
 Web: <http://etra2014.cycu.edu.tw/>

**3<sup>rd</sup> International Language Conference (ILC) 2014**  
 June 4-6, 2014, Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
 Web: <http://iium.edu.my/ilc>

**Doing Research in Applied Linguistics 2 / Independent Learning Association Conference 2014**  
 June 12-14, 2014, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand  
 Website: <http://sola.kmutt.ac.th/dral2014/>

**Sociolinguistics Symposium (SS) 20: Language, Time and Space**  
 June 15-18, 2014, University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
 Website: <https://www.jyu.fi/en/congress/ss20>

**Materials Development Association (MATSDA): SLA and Materials Development 2014 Conference**  
 June 28-29, 2014, University of Liverpool, UK  
 Website: <http://www.liv.ac.uk/english/conferences/matsdajune2014/>

**14<sup>th</sup> National Conference for Community Languages and ESOL (CLESOL) 2014**  
 July 10-13, 2014, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand  
 Website: <http://www.clesol.org.nz/index.html>

**European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) Conference 2014**  
 July 19-22, 2014, European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany  
 Website: <http://www.ewca14.eu/>

**Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée (AILA) World Conference 2014**  
 August 10-15, 2014, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia  
 Website: <http://www.aila2014.com/>

**12<sup>th</sup> International Asia TEFL Conference and 23<sup>rd</sup> Malaysia English Language Teaching International Conference 2014**  
 August 28-30, 2014, Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia  
 Web: <http://asiatefl2014.melta.org.my/>

**22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Korea TESOL International Conference: (KOTESOL) 2014**  
 October 4-5, 2014, COEX Conference Center, Seoul, South Korea  
 Website: <http://koreatesol.org/ic2014>

**International Conference on English Language Teaching (ICELT) 2014**  
 October 24-25, 2014, Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
 Website: <http://nva.hcmussh.edu.vn/3cms/?cmd=170&lang=en>

**Seth Hartigan** works at XJTLU where he teaches EAP to postgraduate students. Dr. Hartigan has over eight years of experience in China, including teaching positions at Renmin and Tsinghua Universities. His academic interests include research into teaching critical thinking, intercultural communication and Legal English.

[seth.hartigan@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:seth.hartigan@xjtlu.edu.cn)





# Call for Papers

ETiC will be publishing a special issue in Summer 2014, which focuses on the theme of **China English/English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**.

## Possible topics for inclusion:

- The status of English within China
- Attitudes towards China English
- Transnational education and Englishes
- Language policies and planning in China
- EAP & English as an academic lingua franca

Contributions can be written in any variety of English which is intelligible to our readers, e.g. China English, Indian English, British English.

Submissions on other topics related to English Language Teaching in China may also be considered.

Please email submissions to [etic@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:etic@xjtlu.edu.cn). Author guidelines and past issues are available on our web site: <http://etic.xjtlu.edu.cn>. Please try to follow the guidelines as closely as possible. The deadline for submissions is 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2014.

The *ETiC* Editorial Team



# Chinese Corner

## Food Word Migrations

Dynamic languages like Chinese and English seem to hungrily snaffle up new words on a regular basis, and the subject of food is particularly replete in terms of exchange words. In countries where English is the mother-tongue, we talk about Mandarin oranges and Chinese gooseberries, a.k.a. kiwi fruit [*qí yì guǒ* 奇异果, literally 'wonder fruit'], thanks to a long history of world trade. Yet sometimes the original name like *kumquat* [Cantonese *kam kwat*, meaning 'golden orange', but *jīn jú* 金橘 in Mandarin], is absorbed into the host culture along with the produce itself.

In the UK for instance, we often crave a cup of cha [*chá* 茶], whilst coffee [*kā fēi* 咖啡] is increasingly popular in China. Oh ... and you may want some chocolate [*qiǎo kè lì* 巧克力] with it too.

In the East and West alike nowadays, people love to book a party [*pài duì* 派对] in a restaurant. This may include a salad [*shā là* 沙拉] to start with. Or you could order some dim sum as a snack starter, served in small portions to literally 'touch the heart' [*dim sum* in Cantonese, but *diǎn xīn* 点心 in Mandarin]; followed by chop suey [*zá suì* 杂碎] meaning 'assorted pieces' or odds and ends, so could be a kind of sino-style bubble & squeak equivalent; and how about some chow mein [*chǎo miàn* 炒面] meaning 'fried noodles'? No Chinese meal will be complete of course without a tofu [*dòu fu* 豆腐] dish, especially if you are a vegetarian.

Throughout China, pizza [*bǐ sà* 比萨] is now a popular choice on some menus; on which you could have a squirt of ketchup [17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, arguably tomato-based, sauce from the coastal provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. It is pronounced 'kôe-chiap', but in Mandarin *fān qié jiàng* 番茄酱, literally 'tomato sauce', to go with it...

At the end of your party, you will need to pay with your credit card [*xìn yòng kǎ* 信用卡], or 'trust-use card'. If you have forgotten your money however, you have the choice of kow-towing [*kòu tóu* 叩头] to the manager, literally 'knocking the floor with your forehead', by offering to wash dishes all evening, or else if you are particularly gung-ho [*gōng hé* 工合] and up for a fight, you can pretend to be a kung-fu [*gōng fu* 功夫] or 'martial art' master before attempting to make a quick getaway. Well, that is unless there is a typhoon [*tái fēng* 台风] or 'big wind' blowing outside!

As of 2013, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) contained around 1,000 words of Chinese origin, and many pundits are forecasting a huge influx of new arrivals over the coming years. So **Chinese Corner** in Issue 5 of **ETiC** will attempt to catch some newly migrating terms before the OED gets them. Please send any words or phrases you would like to nominate to [etic@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:etic@xjtlu.edu.cn).

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Email: [etic@xjtlu.edu.cn](mailto:etic@xjtlu.edu.cn)

Website: [etic.xjtlu.edu.cn](http://etic.xjtlu.edu.cn)



2014 is the Chinese year of the horse.

*qiān lǐ mǎ* [千里马], or 'a horse that can cover a thousand *lǐ* [=500 metres] per day' was used by people in ancient China to describe an able person, especially a person with special talents.

[etic.xjtlu.edu.cn](http://etic.xjtlu.edu.cn)



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