

ETiC

English Teaching in China

A peer-reviewed journal for teaching professionals

Issue 2 • February 2013

Research

- Vocabulary acquisition
- Concerns of Chinese students abroad
- Nominal groups
- Effective feedback
- Teaching grammar

Reflections

- Peer observation
- Teaching writing
- Writing for different purposes

Reviews

- Books
- Websites



Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

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Welcome to Issue 2 of English Teaching in China (ETiC), a bi-annual journal produced by tutors from the Language Centre at XJTLU in Suzhou, China.

It is always a concern once the initial enthusiasm for a project has died down whether it will find the interest and support to continue, particularly something that is produced on a purely voluntary basis by, mostly, very busy English teachers. So, it is very satisfying to see Issue 2 of ETiC published with a similar number and quality of articles to those of the first issue. This is entirely due to the work done by our authors, reviewers and editors. So, a great big thank you to all of you!

In Issue 1, contributions were supplied exclusively by Language Centre tutors from XJTLU. However, for this issue, four of the ten articles have come from authors from outside of the University, a trend we would like to encourage in further issues.

The plan is to produce Issue 3 in August 2013. So, if you have an article you would like to submit for consideration, or even an idea for one you'd like to discuss, please email it to etic@xjtlu.edu.cn. The contribution criteria are simple: it needs to be relevant to *English Teaching in China* and under 2500 words long.

Now, back to Issue 2, its content covers a number of different topics, with research articles on vocabulary levels of Chinese foundation year students, preparing Chinese undergraduates for studying abroad, the use of nominal groups, attitudes to grammar teaching, and providing effective feedback. In addition, we have reflective articles outlining strategies for effective peer observation, teaching writing, and the different reasons Chinese students need to write in English. Finally, we have reviews of a Cambridge University Press grammar book and some useful dictionary websites.

So, a repeated thanks to all those who gave so generously of their time to create this journal. And also, thank you to LC Director Stuart Perrin and XJTLU Senior Management for their support.

We hope that you enjoy reading this publication and I hope to talk to you all again in August 2013 with Issue 3. Happy reading and writing until then!



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The Results of A Vocabulary Levels Test: Version 1 Conducted with Foundation Year Chinese Students

By Renate E. Kirchner

Research into students' level of receptive knowledge of vocabulary towards the end of their first year was conducted in the English Language Centre at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. The subjects were 70 XJTLU Year 1 Finance stream students, 49 female and 21 male, all L1 Mandarin Chinese speakers with just under one academic year of university English language instruction. Paul Nation's monolingual A Vocabulary Levels Test: Version 1 was administered in two groups. Based on an analysis of the results, the average overall number of English words known by XJTLU students towards the end of Year 1 is 5,182 (5,079 in Group A and 5,285 in Group B). Taking into account other studies (Milton and Treffers-Daller, 2011; Hazenberg and Hulstijn, 1996; Nation, 2006), these findings suggest that more focus on vocabulary learning is required in the future.

Introduction

Background

For learners of English as a foreign or second language, building their vocabulary is a crucial part of acquiring the language. When considering reading skills, Nation (2004) contends that a learner will find a text easier to read the larger the size of his or her vocabulary. Hu and Nation (2000, cited in Nation, 2006, p. 61) found that "98% text coverage (1 unknown word in 50) would be needed for most learners to gain adequate comprehension". However, this could be considered the minimum. Nation (2006, p. 61) cites studies by Carver (1994) and Kurnia (2003) showing that 98% coverage presents a very high level of difficulty for most learners. Research results published by Nation in 2006 reveal that, for 98% coverage, a "vocabulary size of around 8,000 to 9,000 words is needed to read newspapers" (p. 72). This figure is relevant as Nation (2006, p. 71) finds that newspapers and academic texts share to a large extent the vocabulary contained in the Academic Word List.

The vocabulary size of learners of a foreign or second language must be seen as an essential aspect of the readiness of first year students to progress in a foreign, unilingual,

learning environment. Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996, p. 155) established that the vocabulary knowledge of non-native prospective students of the Free University of Amsterdam and the University of Amsterdam, who underwent the reading test of the Dutch language university entry examination, was 11,201. The estimated mean vocabulary size was 11,813 for those who passed the test and 9,712 for those who failed (p. 157). Compared to these figures, non-native undergraduate students at the end of their first year knew 15,802 words, whereas Dutch first-year students achieved a result of 18,807 words (p. 154).

In a British context, Milton and Treffers-Daller's (2011) research conducted into the vocabulary size of undergraduate students in Semester 1 at City University, Swansea University and UWE Bristol showed that the mean vocabulary size of non-native speakers of English was 7,500.00, that of bilinguals 9,833.33 and that of monolingual English speakers 10,091.35 (p. 11).

The appropriate level and skills in vocabulary are key to successful academic achievement. Folse (2008) emphasises the importance of extensive vocabulary acquisition for academic reading and writing, especially in the context of writing essays. In particular, the skills of paraphrasing, summarising and synthesising "require (a) full understanding of

the words and phrases in the original and (b) knowledge of another set of words and phrases to express those same ideas ... alternate but accurate vocabulary at the same level of sophistication as the original” (Folse, 2008, p. 2). He also maintains that, in contrast to grammar mistakes, “insufficient vocabulary” or choosing imprecise vocabulary may render a sentence incomprehensible or distort its meaning (p. 3). Dordick (1996, cited in Folse, 2008) states that “lexical errors (including inappropriate word choice or word form) and verb related errors interfered with comprehension the most” (p. 6) .

Research aims

Considering that the language of instruction for Years 2-4 at XJTLU is English, and about half of undergraduate students transfer to the University of Liverpool at the end of Year 2 as part of the 2+2 programme, it was intended to assess the English vocabulary size of XJTLU students after they had been studying English for almost one academic year. It was also considered of interest how many words students know at different word frequency levels.

Research questions

The following research questions have been addressed:

RQ1: How many English vocabulary items and their meanings do XJTLU students know receptively towards the end of their first year of study?

RQ2: How many words do students know passively at the different word frequency levels?

Methodology

Participants

The subjects were 70 XJTLU Year 1 Finance students, Group A consisting of 28 females and 15 males, and Group B 21 females and 6 males. The test procedure was the same for both groups, the only difference being the time they could participate. All were L1 Mandarin Chinese speakers with just under one academic

year of university English language instruction of ten hours per week.

Materials: A Vocabulary Levels Test: Version 1 (Monolingual)

To assess the students’ passive knowledge of English vocabulary, A Vocabulary Levels Test: Version 1 (monolingual), first published in 1983 by Paul Nation, was chosen. This version of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Nation, 2005) consists of five frequency levels: starting with the 2,000 word level, progressing to the 3,000 and the 5,000 word levels, then the Academic Vocabulary level, and finally the 10,000 word level. Out of the 1000 words comprising each level, Nation chose a representative sample of 60 words for the test. The vocabulary items at the Academic Vocabulary level are based on the Academic Word List (Nation, 2004, p. 2). The sixty words at each level are divided into 10 blocks of six, each block containing words of the same word class. Three of the six words in each block are being tested, i.e., thirty in total. Students have to choose three words from the list of six on the left hand side which match their paraphrase on the right hand side. The remaining three words serve as distractors. This task requires a passive recognition of those words whose definitions have been provided, and their meanings, but does not require the subjects to know the distractors (Nation, 2005).

Procedure

The research was conducted near the end of Semester 2 of the Academic Year 2010-2011. Nation’s Vocabulary Levels Test: Version 1 was administered in both groups. In total, 25 minutes were allocated for the participants to complete the test. To extrapolate the average number of English vocabulary items XJTLU students know, Nation’s method of calculating the vocabulary levels of students was used (Nation, 2004, p. 2).

Results and analysis

Experiment results: A Vocabulary Levels Test

At the **2,000 word level**, participants of Group A achieved an average of 90% correct answers (Figure 1), with the lowest score of 56%. In

comparison, Group B achieved an average of 91% correct answers, with the lowest score of 63%. Eight questions out of thirty were answered correctly by all students in both groups.

The overall performance at the **3,000 word level** was lower for both groups, with Group A achieving an average of 65% correct answers, and only one question being answered correctly by all students. The lowest rate was 12%. Group B scored an average of 70% correct answers, with three words out of thirty being correctly matched with their corresponding meaning by all students. The lowest result was 30%.

At the **5,000 word level**, the results for both groups slipped even lower, with an average of 41% of students from Group A and 43% of students of Group B giving correct answers. The lowest score for Group A was 12%, whereas in Group B the lowest result was 7%. In Group A, one question attracted 81% correct answers as the highest score, whereas in Group B the highest rate of correct answers to two questions was 89%.

Compared to the 5,000 word level, students in both groups improved in academic vocabulary. On average, 56% of questions were answered correctly in Group A, whereas in Group B participants achieved 64% of correct answers. In Group A, two questions shared their lowest ranking of 16% correct answers, with only 7 out of 43 students being able to recognise the correct equivalents. Group B students also found one of those questions most difficult, with only 5 out of 27 students

(19%) finding the correct answer. Group A's highest rate of correct answers to one question was 91%, and Group B's highest rate was 89%.

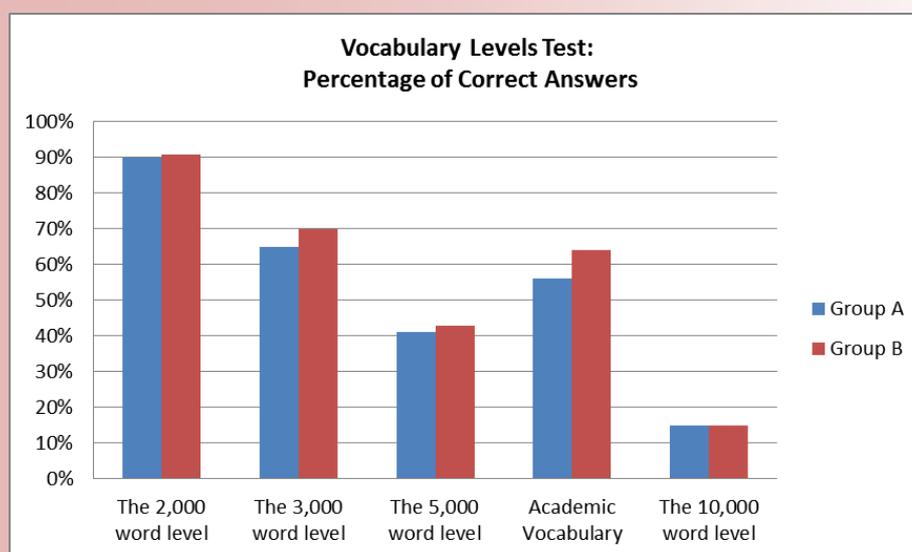
Both groups scored lowest at the **10,000 word level**, where, on average, they achieved identical results of 15%, ranging from no correct answer (0%) to 49% correct answers in Group A, and from no correct answer (0%) to 56% correct answers in Group B.

Estimated size of XJTLU year 1 students' vocabulary

As the 60 words chosen for each level of the test are representative of all 1000 words at this level, Nation (2004, p. 2) argues that the percentage of correct answers a student achieves at each level reflects his or her overall knowledge of words at this level. Applied to the results of this research (see Appendix 1: Table 1), this means that, as Group A achieved an average score of 90% at the 2,000 word level, 900 words at this level can be deemed to be known collectively by this group. Group B scored 91% on average, and, therefore, it can be assumed that students in this group know 910 words but are unfamiliar with 90 words at this level.

Regarding the Academic Word List (AWL) (Nation, 2000: 570 headwords; Coxhead, 2000: 570 word families), it can be concluded that, collectively, members of Group A knew 319 academic words, but were unfamiliar with 251 university level words. Participants of Group B, as a whole, knew 365 vocabulary items at the academic level, but were unfamiliar with 205 crucial words for studying English for Academic

Table 1. VLT: Percentage of correct answers in Groups A and B



Purposes.ⁱ

An estimate of the overall number of words which students in both groups know was made by adding the figures which had been extrapolated at each level. As the VLT started with the 2,000 word level, 1,000 words had to be added for the 1,000 word level, on the assumption that all of these words are known. The researcher also added estimated figures for the 4,000 word level, calculated as an average of the scores achieved at the 3,000 and 5,000 word levels. Due to a lack of data for the 6,000, 7,000, 8,000 and 9,000 word levels, these figures had to be estimated, too.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, it is thought that, beyond the 10,000 level, the percentage of known words would continue to decrease and would likely become negligible. The overall figure for Group A was 5,079 at least passively known words, and for Group B it was 5,285 words.ⁱⁱⁱ

Discussion

The relatively low level of knowledge of Academic Vocabulary and other key academic terms was surprising to the investigator, who was also an English tutor in the Finance stream. A detailed analysis of individual words which students failed to identify reveals that many of the words which students studying Finance at this level might reasonably be expected to know were not known to them, including, for example, words they had encountered in reading texts or listening exercises, or discussed in their EAP classes. Most striking was the lack of knowledge of the adjective “financial”, considering that all subjects were students in the Finance stream.

It should be noted that, in addition to ten contact hours of English teaching and four hours of homework, Year 1 students are expected to devote ten hours per week to self-study. Coxhead’s Academic Word List had been available to students throughout the Academic Year 2010-2011 on the ELC’s intranet site ICE, and students were advised to spend self-study time to learn these vocabulary items. Vocabulary exercises and on-line vocabulary quizzes were also available to students for self study.

Conclusion

Summary of main findings

The VLT revealed that both groups had a very similar command of vocabulary at the 2000 word level as well as at the 10,000 word level, but some variability was seen at other levels. The overall number of English words known by XJTLU students at the end of Year 1 can be extrapolated to be 5,182 (5079 in Group A, and 5285 in Group B).

Implications and recommendations

In contrast to the non-native students’ knowledge of Dutch vocabulary as estimated by Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996), and the mean English vocabulary size of non-native undergraduate students as extrapolated by Milton and Treffers-Daller (2011), the number of English words known by XJTLU students near the end of their first year appears very low. Taking into account Nation’s (2006) estimate of 8,000 to 9,000 words required for 98% coverage when reading newspapers, and also considering Folse’s (2008) analysis of the central role vocabulary plays in academic success, it can be judged that students with vocabulary sizes of approximately 5,000 would probably struggle on an undergraduate degree programme in English. Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996, p. 158) conclude that “individuals with a vocabulary of fewer than ten thousand base words run a serious risk of not attaining the reading comprehension level required for entering university studies.” Milton and Treffers-Daller (2011, p. 21) state that “[a] figure of 10,000 words suggests that many of our students must be on the cusp of having sufficient vocabulary to handle the textbooks and articles we give them to read.” Therefore, the results of this study suggest that a strong emphasis needs to be placed on learning and teaching vocabulary for students planning on studying in an English-medium higher education context.

Nation (2004, p. 1) insists that high frequency words “deserve repeated attention from the teacher, the learner and the course book” and recommends that “learners with academic purposes should also include the *Academic Word List* in their high frequency words”. Folse (2008, p. 9) states that “[m]erely comprehending input or reading extensively will not suffice for the amount of vocabulary that a non-native speaker must learn ... Explicit

^{i, ii, iii} See Appendix 2: End Notes.

instruction in specific vocabulary and in vocabulary learning strategies is essential". He proposes to "[m]ake sure that explicit teaching of vocabulary is included in the writing program from the lowest level of vocabulary" (p. 14).

It is, therefore, recommended that university EAP programmes consider ways of incorporating vocabulary teaching and learning in their curriculum, and allocate more time for the acquisition process. It is further suggested that vocabulary testing should be made part of continuous normative assessment.

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Appendix 1: Table 1

Estimated size of XJTLU students' vocabulary based on available data up to and including the 10,000 word level, plus 570 Academic Vocabulary.

	Group A			Group B		
	Score	Known	Un-known	Score	Known	Un-known
<i>The 1,000 word level (estimate)</i>	100%	1,000	0	100%	1,000	0
The 2,000 word level	90%	900	100	91%	910	90
The 3,000 word level	65%	650	350	70%	700	300
<i>The 4,000 word level (estimate)</i>	53%	530	470	57%	570	430
The 5,000 word level	41%	410	590	43%	430	570
<i>The 6,000 word level (estimate)</i>	35.8%	358	642	37.4%	374	626
<i>The 7,000 word level (estimate)</i>	30.6%	306	694	31.8%	318	682
<i>The 8,000 word level (estimate)</i>	25.4%	254	746	26.2%	262	738
<i>The 9,000 word level (estimate)</i>	20.2%	202	798	20.6%	206	794
The 10,000 word level	15%	150	850	15%	150	850
Academic Vocabulary	56%	319	251	64%	365	205
Total		5,079	5,491		5,285	5,285

Appendix 2: End notes

i. As Group A achieved a score of 56% for the Academic Vocabulary, the researcher calculated 570 times 56%, arriving at a figure of 319 known words. Group B's result of 365 familiar words was calculated by multiplying 570 with 64%, which was the percentage of correct answers accomplished by Group B for this level. By subtracting the numbers of words which were known collectively by each group from the total of 570, the numbers of unfamiliar words could be judged.

ii. It is safe to assume that, beyond the 5,000 word level, the numbers are likely to decline further and further at each level, until they reach the 15% attained at the 10,000 word level (150 words known). The researcher used the following calculations to arrive at the figures, even though the number of known words may not be as evenly distributed between levels as has been assumed here: Group A: The difference between 41% at the 5,000 level and 15% at the 10,000 level equals 26%, divided by 5 (five steps from the 5,000 level to the 10,000 level), equals 5.2%. 6000 word level: 41% minus 5.2% = 35.8%; 7000 word level: 35.8% minus 5.2% = 30.6%; 8000 word level: 30.6% minus 5.2% = 25.4%; 9000 word level: 25.4% minus 5.2% = 20.2%; (10,000 word level: 20.2% minus 5.2% = 15.0%). Group B: The difference between 43% at the 5,000 level and 15% at the 10,000 level equals 28%, divided by 5 (five steps from the 5,000 level to the 10,000 level), equals 5.6%. 6000 word level: 43% minus 5.6% = 37.4%; 7000 word level: 37.4% minus 5.6% = 31.8%; 8000 word level: 31.8% minus 5.6% = 26.2%; 9000 word level: 26.2% minus 5.6% = 20.6%; (10,000 word level: 20.6% minus 5.6% = 15.0%).

iii. Some students handed in blank pages, or left parts of a page blank. These were counted as zero-scores, although it was difficult to ascertain whether "no answer" was due to a genuine lack of knowledge of a word, or due to the lack of time available, or motivation to complete this part.

A Preliminary Investigation into the Major Concerns of Chinese Students Preparing to Study Abroad: A Practical Approach to Facilitating Student Transition

By Joseph Davies

This preliminary investigation proposes a simple and practical methodology that both identifies and addresses the major concerns of Chinese undergraduate students preparing to study abroad. The aim of the study is to highlight potential problems in order to facilitate the transition of students who study abroad. This method seeks to prepare international students for the major differences in academic expectations, lifestyle and culture.

The study focuses on Chinese undergraduate students preparing to complete their degrees at partner universities based in the UK, the US and Canada. However, the suggested methodology can be easily utilised for students of other nationalities. The primary data presented were collected by asking three student focus groups to complete a questionnaire: 1) Chinese undergraduate students preparing to study abroad, 2) Chinese undergraduate students currently studying abroad, 3) British and European undergraduate students based in the UK studying alongside Chinese students.

The findings were analysed, and common, significant concerns are highlighted and discussed herein. Ideally, the findings can be used to promote a dynamic and interactive learning platform that fully prepares students for their international education. By implementing this suggested methodology it is anticipated that student satisfaction would have the potential to be increased, which will in turn lead to a stronger future collaboration between the partner universities and an increase in future international student recruitment.

Introduction

As recent global trends develop, globalisation has seen an exponential rise in international flows of information, people, financial capital, knowledge, technology and enterprise (Appadurai, 1996; Scholte, 2000). A fine example of how globalisation has impacted upon recent society can be found within the education sector and, in particular, the internationalisation of tertiary education (Lam, 2006; Brown, 2008; Kelly, 2009). For instance, it is estimated that by 2020 the total global demand for international student places will

reach 5.8 million (Böhm et al., 2004).

As English is one of the most widely used languages worldwide, studying in an English speaking country presents a significant number of employment advantages especially for students originating from less developed countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Punto & Krishna, 2011). Such opportunity brings about strong competition and it is paramount that consumers (international students) are satisfied with the service they receive. Sweeney and Ingram (2001) define student satisfaction as "the perception of enjoyment and accomplishment in the learning

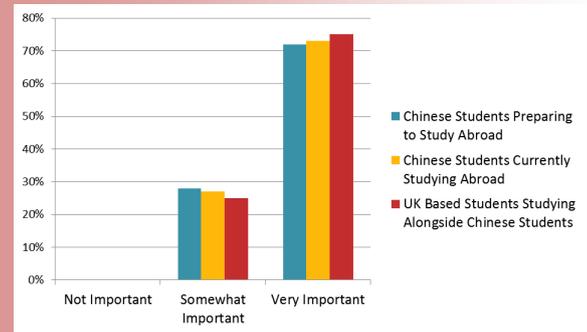
environment" (p. 57). Not only has student satisfaction been shown to correlate strongly with learning (Guolla, 1999) but from a financial perspective, if students are satisfied with their international experience this is likely to enhance future international student recruitment. This is particularly important for universities based in England given the recent rise in domestic students' tuition fees (Paton, 2011). However, when considering "student satisfaction" for international students certain factors must be considered (Gu, 2009).

Methodology

This preliminary study aims to identify and analyse the major concerns Chinese undergraduate students have about studying abroad. Ideally, common factors will be identified and acted upon by suggesting potential solutions. There were three focus groups identified for this study. Focus Group 1 was comprised of 212 Chinese undergraduate students currently studying in China preparing to complete their degree programmes at partner universities based in the UK, the US or Canada. Focus Group 2 was comprised of 40 Chinese undergraduate students currently completing their degree programmes in one of the above mentioned partner universities. Finally, Focus Group 3 was comprised of 12 British and European undergraduate students who are currently studying or have studied in the UK alongside Chinese undergraduate students (hereafter referred to as UK based students).

Students were invited to complete an anonymous questionnaire comprised of both closed and open-ended questions providing both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. The idea behind introducing Focus Groups 2 and 3 into the study was to provide further triangulation for analysis and to establish if students' pre-departure concerns were the same concerns shared by Chinese students currently studying abroad. Furthermore, the opinions and data collected from British and European UK based students who study alongside Chinese students could be used to gain an understanding of potential social, cultural and/or interactive difficulties Chinese students may face when studying abroad but from the perspective of host students.

Figure 1. Question: how important is it for Chinese students to learn about university life abroad?



Three questions informed the direction of this study:

RQ1: What are the major concerns of Chinese students preparing to study abroad?

RQ2: Do these concerns corroborate with the reality of studying abroad, i.e. do they match the concerns of Chinese students currently studying abroad?

RQ3: How can this information be used to help better prepare Chinese students for their international student experience?

This preliminary investigation aims to have two benefactors: initially, international students preparing to study abroad and, secondly, the partner institutions which are providing the educational services.

Results

Quantitative data analysis

For Chinese international students, the importance of learning about foreign university life cannot be underestimated with over 70% of all three focus groups indicating that this is very important (Figure 1). Figure 2 interestingly highlights differences between the three focus groups with regard to how strongly they agree Chinese students have been well prepared for studying abroad. 42% of UK based respondents either strongly disagreed (17%) or disagreed (25%) with the statement in comparison to just 11% of Chinese students (Group 1) who either strongly disagreed (2%) or disagreed (9%).

Figure 2. Question: to what extent do you agree that Chinese students are well prepared for studying abroad?

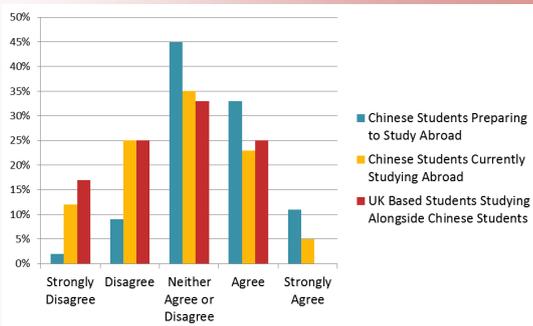


Figure 3. Question: to what extent do you agree that you would be more comfortable if your university took more time to prepare you for studying abroad?

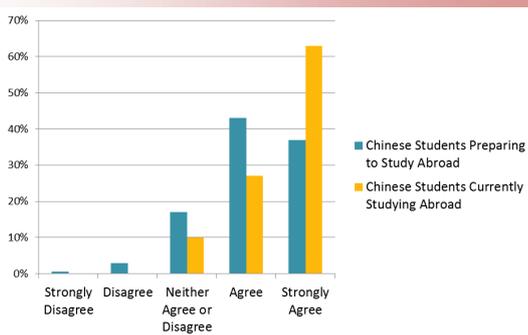


Figure 4. Question: how often do you contact students studying at your partner university on the same programme?

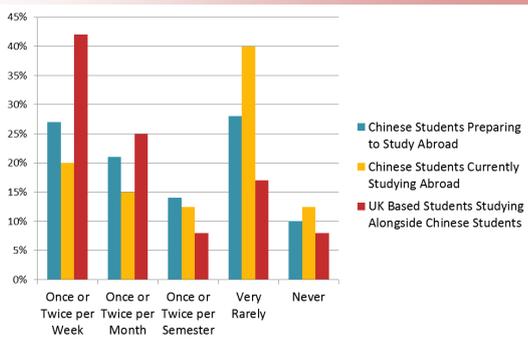
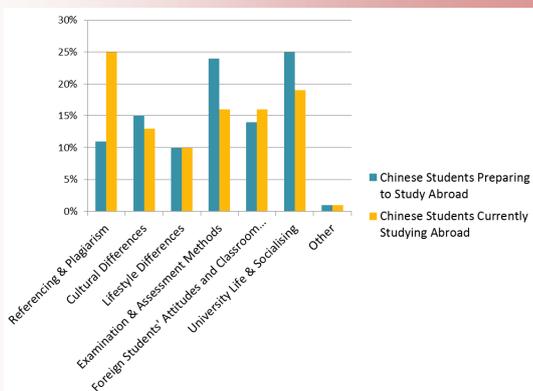


Figure 5. Question: what do you think is the most important aspect to learn about western university life?



Furthermore, 85% of all Chinese students agreed they would be more comfortable if their university took more time to prepare them for studying abroad (Figure 3).

Figure 4 highlights a distinct lack of communication between students studying at partner universities with 38% of Chinese students currently preparing to study abroad contacting other Chinese students at their partner university very rarely (28%) or never (10%). Similarly 52.5% of Chinese respondents currently studying abroad very rarely (40%) or never (12.5%) contacted current Chinese students preparing to study abroad on the same programme. On the other hand, and somewhat surprisingly, 42% of UK based respondents contacted current Chinese students preparing to study on their programme once or twice a week (see discussion).

Figure 5 shows that Chinese respondents believed it is most important to learn about university life and socialising, examination and assessment methods, and referencing and plagiarism. In addition to the results shown in Figures 1-5, surprisingly, 69% of Chinese respondents preparing to study abroad did not know who to contact with questions about studying at their partner university. From the perspective of host students, 100% of British and European UK based students found it either challenging (33%) or somewhat challenging (67%) to work and study alongside Chinese students. Further to this point 75% of those UK based students either agreed (58%) or strongly agreed (17%) that the Chinese students on their course do not interact with UK based students.

Qualitative data analysis

The two major concerns shared by all three focus groups were identified as the Chinese students' lack of English ability and the lack of integration between Chinese and host students. Both focus groups 1 and 2 also agreed that lifestyle differences, examination and assessment methods, personal safety and matters pertaining to referencing and plagiarism were all significant aspects of concern.

Both Chinese focus groups stated they

would have strongly benefitted from extra culture classes and an increased number of English lessons prior to departure. Other suggestions included but were not limited to:

- Having more communication with current Chinese and foreign/host students at the partner university.
- Teaching and assessing in the same style as the partner university.
- Providing referencing and sourcing exercises.
- Inviting past Chinese students to share their experiences of studying abroad.
- Engaging in foreign exchange visits.
- Using English to teach all classes.
- Providing more opportunities for students to develop their academic writing skills.

UK based student suggestions centred on the Chinese students' poor English ability and the lack of integration between Chinese and UK based students. They suggested providing Chinese students with an English-speaking (host/UK based student) "buddy". Further suggestions included providing Chinese students with compulsory extra language classes and organising compulsory social events where Chinese students are encouraged to integrate with UK based students. Appendix A provides a series of student quotes taken directly from questionnaire scripts (only spelling and major grammatical errors have been edited). It is interesting to gain an insight into the individual thought processes of students representing each of the three focus groups.

Recommended solutions

The results presented in Figure 2 imply that international student preparation could be improved. The question is how can universities realistically achieve this? Based upon the author's personal experience of preparing Chinese students to study abroad and the results presented herein, potential solutions will now be suggested.

Both Chinese students' English ability and cultural and social integration between Chinese and host students could be improved if Chinese students communicated more often with host

and Chinese students currently abroad. Such pre-departure communication should be focused and directed towards informing students about cultural and university lifestyle differences. It may be worthwhile to introduce online communication as a compulsory element of a language module. Such online discussion groups could be hosted using an interactive online teaching platform such as E-learn, or Blackboard (Essel & Owusu-Boateng, 2011; Speece, 2012).

A further solution could be foreign exchange visits. For example, cohorts of UK based undergraduate students studying at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) visit Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) annually, attending lectures and partaking in groupwork activities (Bibby & Horn, 2012). As these students will be working together in the UK, this initial meeting and interaction based in the comfort of the Chinese students' home environment is extremely reassuring. Further to academic participation, social and cultural activities are organised, encouraging students from both groups to interact outside of the classroom.

Pre-departure academic workshops delivered in English could also be introduced, covering topics such as formal assessment styles, referencing and plagiarism, the difference between lectures and seminars, accessing and utilising peer reviewed sources, critical thinking and analytical skills. It is paramount that such issues are explained to Chinese students well in advance of their departure date. For instance, as Tait (2012) points out, plagiarism may in fact be culturally constructed.

A simple and mutually rewarding solution would be to assign Chinese students a host student "buddy" or "mentor" upon arrival. Such a system would undoubtedly allow the host student to develop in terms of their cultural adaptability and willingness to communicate within culturally diverse teams (Adler, 2008). This will encourage the Chinese students to use English more frequently, offering them the opportunity to interact with a foreign student and develop their cultural awareness.

Discussion

Language not only impacts the ability to learn,

but can also lead to decreased confidence among students (Ramburuth & Tani, 2009). This in turn leads to other well-noted problems such as the lack of interaction between Chinese students and local host students. Despite all three focus groups wanting more interaction and communication with one another, the English ability of Chinese students preparing to study abroad must first be developed. Once achieved, it is the author's assumption that this will improve the confidence of Chinese students, leading to increased cross-cultural integration upon arrival at the partner university.

Wu (2009) proposes the concept of "face" as a key variable and influential factor that can explain the complexity of Chinese students' reluctance to communicate in western university classes. Without an understanding of such cultural implications, which are rarely expressed in western society, both staff and students based at host universities may find it difficult to work with Chinese students. Gopal (2011) highlights that many lecturers are not trained to deal with students of other cultures and this may have a negative effect upon both the suitability of the teaching received and student satisfaction of Chinese students studying abroad.

The results of this preliminary study are not the first to have noted a correlation between international students' English ability and their international student experience (Halic et al., 2009; Ramburuth & Tani, 2009; Montgomery, 2010). As was observed in this study (Appendix A), with regard to the English accent of foreign lecturers and students, Halic et al. (2009) identified that international students struggled to comprehend what was being discussed in lectures. A further example of language impacting negatively upon the social interaction between host and Chinese students is the host students' fear that what they say in English may be misinterpreted as being racially or ethnically insensitive (Montgomery, 2010).

This provides further evidence of the need for pre-departure communication and, where possible, integration between Chinese students and host students, so they can become familiar with each others' cultural perspectives and colloquial language patterns. Such language challenges should not just be ignored, leaving international students to simply adjust upon arrival at the host university. Instead, faculty

members should utilise examples that mitigate the impact that the host language can have, providing time for international students to adapt (Croese, 2011).

One of the author's pre-determined assumptions was that there would be very minimal, if any, contact between Chinese students preparing to study abroad and host students. However, having made a connection during the foreign exchange visit organised by UCLan and GDUFS (Bibby & Horn, 2012), results showed that the majority (42%) of British and European UK based students contacted the Chinese students once or twice a week (see Figure 4). It is, however, doubtful that this is representative of all partner programmes and, if anything, such results highlight how successful foreign exchange programmes can be in preparing Chinese students for studying abroad, especially with regard to social and cultural integration between Chinese and host students.

The results identify a clear uniformity regarding pre-departure concerns of Chinese students and their perceptions about what improvements are required. Importantly, the findings have correlated well between focus groups. If the concerns of all three groups can be addressed this will undoubtedly prove beneficial for all parties involved. This paper was intended as a preliminary investigation with the hope of further data being gathered to supplement and enhance the findings within. With this in mind the largest criticism of the study must be the relatively small sample size, especially for focus groups 2 and 3 and the fact that the size of the three focus groups differed significantly. Nevertheless, the results presented herein should certainly provide a useful insight into the perspectives of all three student groups in order for future research to be conducted in response to this study.

Conclusion

As the rate of globalisation accelerates, international higher education partnerships are here to stay. This preliminary investigation has identified the key concerns related to studying abroad of three closely related groups of students. The findings presented in this paper, coupled with the experience of the author in preparing Chinese students to study abroad, have been utilised to propose practically

applicable methods to address such key concerns. Ideally the methods and data presented in this paper will be easily transferrable to suit students originating from other cultures and, with further follow up research, a more precise picture of the major concerns international students have about studying abroad can be presented.

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Appendix A

Student quotes taken directly from questionnaire scripts (only spelling and major grammatical errors have been edited)

Focus Group 1 - Chinese Students Currently Preparing to Study Abroad

Q. Please list your 3 biggest worries/concerns about studying/living abroad.

2nd year undergraduate, preparing to study in Canada.

1. My reading and writing is not good even though we have classes here.
2. The way people talk is different from the way people talk in classes here.
3. For the difference in culture, I am afraid of making friends abroad.

2nd year undergraduate, preparing to study in the UK.

1. I am worried that I can't listen to the teachers clearly, maybe they have some accents and speak too fast.
2. I am worried that foreign people will look down on Chinese people.
3. There are more safety dangers, for example more theft.

Q. Can you suggest some ways in which your Chinese university could prepare you more for studying abroad?

2nd year undergraduate, preparing to study in the UK.

1. Training us to write longer essays (about 10,000 words or so).
2. Giving us more opportunities to communicate with foreign students in our partner university.
3. Introducing more information of the partner university like the studying style, dormitory etc.

Focus Group 2 - Chinese Students Currently Studying Abroad

Q. What has been the most challenging aspect of studying abroad?

3rd year undergraduate, currently studying in Canada.

I think it would still be the language. This is because although students get 7 or more in the IELTS exam, they cannot understand the instructors' words because instructors speak in different tones and speed.

3rd year undergraduate, currently studying in Canada.

I think students' writing and speaking are the most challenging aspects. If you want to compete with the native students and get good grades on your course, you really need to improve your writing and speaking because you have to do many presentations and write many essays on the final exam

Q. Can you suggest some ways in which your Chinese university could better prepare students for studying abroad?

3rd year undergraduate, currently studying in the UK.

1. Use the same way and standard for giving marks.
2. Do more practice to teach students how to think critically. Here in the UK it is not good enough to just use descriptive writing.
3. Create some courses to teach students how to paraphrase from the sources correctly.

3rd year undergraduate, currently studying in the UK.

1. Academic writing skills with Harvard Referencing.
2. Show some videos about current students' university life in the UK.
3. Provide foreign academic journal articles to read.

Q. What advice would you give to Chinese undergraduate students who are currently preparing to study abroad?

3rd year undergraduate, currently studying in Canada.

Try their best to learn English well in China, because all students will be treated equally in foreign universities. I mean instructors will not slow down the speed of speaking for you, because most students except you can understand the

instructors.

Focus Group 3 - British and European UK Based Undergraduate Students Studying Alongside Chinese Students

Q. Please list the 3 most challenging aspects of studying alongside Chinese students.

Student A

1. Chinese students have difficulty expressing their opinion.
2. Most of them have strong difficulties to meet the requirements when working in teams with non Chinese students. Therefore they often rely completely on the others' work and demonstrate a lack of autonomy.
3. Most of them do not try to integrate with non Chinese students or speak barely any English.

Student B

1. The language barrier, they seem to be unfamiliar with the English language.
2. They keep close with their own friends from China, not socializing with others.

Q. Can you suggest some ways in which your university could help the Chinese students adapt to studying abroad?

Student C

1. More visits from international students!
2. Some cultural activities based around the foreign country they are studying in.
3. Get the Chinese students to contact UK based students in order to ask questions that they may not want to discuss with teachers.

Student D

1. Arrange a short pre-visit.
2. Be assigned an English "buddy" or mentor.
3. Compulsory social events with U.K based students.

Q. What advice would you give to Chinese undergraduate students who are currently preparing to study abroad?

Student E

Learning the language as well as possible will help them to integrate better into student life. Also, try to interact with non-Chinese students, because they can help explain confusing parts of lectures.

Student F

Make sure your English is the best it can be, make lots of English friends as well as Chinese friends. Use the help provided by the University which helps the students adapt to life here better, including improving their English and exam technique.

The Logic of Nominal Groups

By Tim Casteling

It is widely accepted that written language is more lexically dense than spoken language, and this difference is even more pronounced in the case of academic texts, which are often characterised by the use of complex nominal groups (Halliday, 1993; Vande Kopple, 1994; Cullip, 2000; Fang, 2004). This study investigates the ability of a group of Chinese L1 speakers to make use of extended nominal groups in a written task which was similar to an academic data report. An analysis of the nominal groups composed by the subjects reveals that they had specific difficulties with post-modification, particularly in terms of word order. The relationship between their errors and L1 is investigated in more detail, and specific recommendations are made on how to raise learners' awareness of these issues in the classroom.

The development of academic writing skills

The essential distinction between the linguistic features of spoken and written language largely has to do with the distance between reader and writer (Christie, 1998; Halliday, 2001). Without an immediate, shared context, writers must supply more information to make their meanings clear, and as a result “written English typically shows a much denser pattern of lexicalized content” (Halliday, 2001, p. 182). In other words, written language has a higher proportion of ‘content’ words. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the way in which processes can be represented by nouns instead of verbs, and this is especially prevalent in academic writing (Cullip, 2000). Consequently, even for native speakers of English, acquiring the necessary skills to write in academic genres can be a significant challenge. Specifically, this often entails increasing the writer’s use of complex nominal groups (NGs), which may also include embedded clauses (Christie, 2002). It could be argued that these lexico-grammatical features present a particular challenge for non-native writers, especially for those pursuing tertiary studies in English. One specific example of how this might affect these students is the need to paraphrase information from such NGs in their

own essays. For all of these reasons, there seems to be a specific need for research that can highlight such learners’ difficulties in this regard, and provide guidance for teachers on how to assist them.

Some background on nominal groups

A number of researchers (Halliday, 1993; Vande Kopple, 1994; Cullip, 2000; Fang, 2004) have emphasized the role of NGs in defining academic genres. One reason for the importance of NGs is that writing research reports of most kinds requires packaging information as efficiently as possible. As a result, we see that writers of academic papers often reframe processes as nominalisations or NGs.

It therefore stands to reason that texts like these are characterised by heavy lexical density (Halliday, 1993; Veel, 1997; Fang, 2004) with the majority of information contained in extended NGs. The first way in which this density is achieved is through nominalisation – replacing verbs and clauses with nouns and nominal groups. A typical example cited by Halliday (1993) is “**glass crack growth rate** instead of **how quickly cracks in glass grow**” (p. 79, author’s own emphasis). Secondly, as Vande Kopple (1994) has shown, higher lexical density is often achieved through the use of

extensive pre and post-modification of NGs. The following example from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* illustrates how extended post-modification is commonly employed, even in popular science writing:

“the **speed** of light measured in the direction of the earth's motion through the ether” (1988, p. 12). (Bold indicates the head word, and italics indicate post-modification)

There is essentially no limit to the degree of post-modification which is possible in English, and an entire clause can be used to post-modify a head word, or even one of its post-modifiers. Any clause which operates as a post-modifier is part of an NG, and can be referred to as an embedded clause, as seen in Figure 1, taken from an IELTS test rubric.

The research question

Given the findings of previous studies (Christie, 1998, 2002; Whittaker, Llinares & McCabe, 2011), it seems unlikely that the use of complex NGs would be intuitive to relatively inexperienced writers for whom English is a foreign language. Therefore, this study set out to establish how well Chinese L1 writers from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate levels were capable of framing complex items using nominalisation and elaborated NGs, and whether their responses would help provide patterns of systematic learner errors which could tentatively be offered as a guide to students and teachers.

Materials and subjects

IELTS writing task one requires candidates to describe a visual representation of information, generally some form of a graph or diagram. In the test, the rubric itself states the purpose of

the graph and in order to meet the requirements of the task candidates need to paraphrase, but not copy, the rubric to form the purpose statements of their own reports. As a result, these opening sentences are ideal for characterising learners' ability to succinctly nominalise relatively complex ideas based on information in the graph and the rubric. In this study, ten such purpose statements were analysed in terms of their NGs. Participants in this study were recent college graduates and native speakers of Mandarin Chinese from Taiwan who had just completed a sixty-hour IELTS test preparation course. Their English ability varied from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

Data analysis procedures

The nominal group (NG) for each purpose statement was isolated so that these NGs could be further analysed. Each distinct NG was broken down according to Hallidayan principles, as laid out by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, pp. 309-334). In this instance, there was potential for ambiguity because in Systemic Functional Grammar two NGs connected by means of a linking conjunction such as 'and' are known as nominal group complexes, which may work together as a single subject or complement (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, pp.146-147). However, since each separate NG can be clearly identified, they will be dealt with separately here. The mechanics of this analysis are probably best demonstrated by looking more closely at the purpose statement from the provided IELTS model answer.

“The chart gives information about post-school qualifications in terms of different levels of further education reached by men and women in Australia in 1999” (Cambridge IELTS 4, p.82). (The

Figure 1. Embedded clause. (Cambridge IELTS 4, 2007, p. 82)

Pre-modifier	the
Head	proportion
Post-modifier 1	of men and women [who held them]
Post-modifier 2	in 1999

Figure 2. (Cambridge IELTS 4, 2007, p. 82)

Head	information
Post-modifier 1	about post-school qualifications
Post-modifier 2	in terms [of different levels [of further education [reached by men and women]]]
Post-modifier 3	in Australia
Post-modifier 4	in 1999

NG is highlighted in italics)

As the square brackets in Figure 2 show, the second post-modifier itself is subject to heavy post-modification, including an embedded clause.

Every clearly identifiable NG from all participant responses, as well as the test rubric and model answer, were subject to the same analysis, and the results were tabulated.

Results

As expected, on average, the participants' NGs are highly elaborate, with almost all of them showing the full complement of pre-modifier, head word and post-modifier. It is also clear that post-modification is far more extensive than pre-modification, and pre-modification is always performed by basic determiners, usually 'the'. Given that the test rubric itself has the complement broken into two distinct NGs, it is hardly surprising that this pattern was followed by four out of ten participants. However, this

situation has left us with two fairly distinct data sets – those which can be compared to the test rubric, with two NGs (hereafter referred to as 2NG), and those which are comparable to the IELTS sample answer, with a single NG (1NG). These differences are significant, as borne out by the data shown in Table 1.

It is clear that the simpler 2NG formula produced less variation between participants, and between their responses and the rubric, whereas the opposite is true for the 1NG formula. Obviously, in contrast to the 1NG pattern, the 2NG pattern reduces the need for elaborate post-modification. As we have seen, it is possible for a single NG to contain a great deal of information, often achieved through post-modification. Unsurprisingly, then, these NGs are characterised by a higher average number of post-modifiers and embedded clauses.

Given this situation, it seems likely that the 2NG group would generally have the more coherent responses, and this seems to be borne out by the data. In fact the 1NG group

Table 1: Pre and Post-Modifiers for each NG.

Name	Number of pre-modifiers	No. of post-modifiers	Embedded clauses
Rubric NG 1	2	2	0
Rubric NG 2	1	2	1
Carol NG 1	2	2	0
Carol NG 2	1	2	1
Vincent NG 1	1	2	0
Vincent NG 2	1	2	0
Sylvia NG 1	1	2	0
Sylvia NG 2	1	2	1
Albert NG 1	2	2	0
Albert NG 2	1	2	0
2 NG Gp mean	1.3	2	0.3
Model Answer	0	4	1
Tanya	1	3	1
Mary	1	2	0
Lance	0	2	1
Mark	1	4	0
Eunice	1	3	0
Claire	1	3	1
1 NG Gp mean	0.833	3	0.571

exemplifies a number of problems with post-modification. Figure 3 shows the response by Mark².

As we can see, the post-modification in this NG appears in the form of four simple qualifiers, not coherently linked together. It

Figure 3. Mark's response.

Pre-modifier	how many
Head	percentage
Post-modifier 1	in different licenses
Post-modifier 2	in Australia
Post-modifier 3	due to sex
Post-modifier 4	in 1999

Figure 4. Compensated response.

Pre-modifier	the
Head	percentage
Post-modifier 1	of different licenses/ qualifications
Post-modifier 2	in Australia
Post-modifier 3	according to sex
Post-modifier 4	in 1999

Figure 5. Tanya's response.

Pre-modifier	the
Head	proportion
Post-modifier 1	of post school qualifications [which men and women acquired]
Post-modifier 2	in Australia
Post-modifier 3	in 1999

may appear that their failing lies in surface lexical issues, and we might compensate for these in the following chart (Figure 4).

However, this modified NG would still fail to identify the appropriate sentential focus because we are looking at 'percentages of men and women', not 'percentages of qualifications'. This highlights the fact that problems such as this are not merely questions of surface grammar, but of confusion about the logic of post-modification itself. This same confusion is clearly illustrated in Tanya's response (Figure 5).

In fact, it is revealing to look at the number of participants who correctly focused on the percentage/proportion of men and women, and then post-modified that with possession of qualifications. Significantly, we see that only four (Carol, Sylvia, Eunice and Claire) could reasonably be said to have done so, and two could be said to have transposed the focus to a percentage/proportion of qualifications (Mark, Tanya), while two (Vincent and Albert) failed to connect the two concepts in a meaningful way. Vincent's response is a clear example:

"The given information illustrates the qualifications in the several levels in Australia, and it also reveals the proportion of men and women in 1999."

The remaining two responses were too ambiguous to be neatly categorized. The results are summarised in Table 2.

Moreover, given the distribution of data into two distinct groups, it is also informative

Table 2: Percentage/Proportion of Men and Women Post-modified by Possession of Qualifications

Correct order of post-modification:	Transposed	Treated as separate entities	Ambiguous
4	2	2	2

Table 3: Percentage/Proportion of Men and Women Post-modified by Possession of Qualifications (according to group)

	Correct order of post-modification	Transposed	Treated as separate entities	Ambiguous
Total	4	2	2	2
1NG group	2	2		2
2NG group	2		2	

²Participants' real names are not given.

to look at the differences by group, as shown in Table 3.

On the whole, it seems that using a single, more elaborated NG made the key elements more likely to be transposed or ambiguous, while the double NG pattern raised the risk of treating them as entirely separate entities. Overall, in terms of readability and coherence, the most serious problems were related to the ordering of post-modifiers, and of lexical issues with prepositional phrases.

Discussion

These results strongly suggest that almost all participants experienced difficulty following the intuitive logic of post-modification to at least some extent. In fact, since all come from a Chinese (Mandarin) L1 background, it does raise the question of L1 interference. Particularly relevant is the fact that while English relative clauses are post-modifying, the same kind of qualification would be realised by pre-modification in Chinese. In Mandarin, this pre-modification is achieved through the use of the particle *de*, as in Figure 6, from Chen (2006, p. 101).

The implication of this is corroborated in a study by Fang and Wu (2010) highlighting the particular difficulties which embedded clauses presented for Chinese L1 translators. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that the effect of L1 interference may be reduced with increasing L2 proficiency, as shown in Chan's (2004) study of lower and upper intermediate learners in Hong Kong. Furthermore, research by Whittaker, Llinares and McCabe (2011) suggests that as a group of Spanish students went into their third and fourth year of high school, they made increases in pre and post-modification of nominal groups in English.

Finally, while the present research did not focus on lexical issues, it is obvious that prepositional phrases, which are an integral part of post-modifiers, were a source of

difficulty for almost all participants, and this might be a fruitful area for future study.

Limitations

Given that the present study was limited to a relatively small sample, these findings should be read with caution. Nonetheless, these results are suggestive of certain patterns in learner errors, and therefore highlight the need for further research in this area. In particular, it may be instructive to investigate the response of Chinese L1 writers to a non-verbal prompt without the need for paraphrasing.

Applications

As we have seen, research reports are lexically very dense, and characterised by extended nominal groups. Consequently, they are bound to present problems for unskilled writers for a number of reasons. I would suggest that there are two key elements to the mastery of nominal groups.

Firstly, nominalisation itself is a matter of knowing the nominal equivalents of both verbs (grow/growth), and noun clauses (how fast cracks grow/crack growth rate), as well as how they are applied in practice. While this is clearly not intuitive for students, there are countless opportunities for teachers of academic English to raise learners' awareness of nominalisation. For instance, students could be asked to highlight sentential Themes (topics) and Rhemes (comments) in sentences, which could lead into raising their awareness of those subjects and complements which are in fact nominalisations. In fact, it has been shown that that reading comprehension would also be improved by such awareness (Chen, Song & Wang, 2011).

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, we have seen how post-modification presents particular difficulties for learners from a Chinese L1 background. There are two elements to consider here. Firstly, embedded

Figure 6: Example of pre-modification in Mandarin Chinese. Ptcl indicates 'particle' and Loc-V indicates 'locative verb'. (Chen, 2006, p.101)

na4ben3	Ni3	zuo2tian1	yao4	jie4	de	shu1	zai4	zhe4er2
that	you	yesterday	want	borrow	(Ptcl)	book	(Loc-v)	here

Here is the book you wanted to borrow yesterday.

clauses can be an issue. While it is tempting to focus on grammatical accuracy, simply practicing the mechanics of relative clauses is unlikely to remedy the central problem, which often has more to do with meaning – as revealed in the present study. In this case, we would be advised to have students use the target language for meaningful communicative tasks which require defining or paraphrasing. Then, there are post-modifying prepositional phrases, which seem to create problems not only with syntax, but also lexical choice. Here we may want to raise students' awareness of prepositional phrases by having them recognise prepositions and help them to analyse examples such as the following:

“the first [of many steps [on the road [to ruin]]]” (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p. 146)

In conclusion, I would argue that teachers have a duty to provide learners with appropriate 'consciousness raising' activities and meaningful, communicative tasks. Without explicit instruction and necessary scaffolding, it is unlikely that learners of English for academic purposes will begin to master the intricacies of complex nominal groups, which are so vital for academic discourse.

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Appendix

IELTS Test Rubric

The chart below shows *the different levels of post-school qualifications in Australia and the proportion of men and women who held them in 1999*.

IELTS Model Answer

The chart gives *information about post-school qualifications in terms of different levels of further education reached by men and women in Australia in 1999*.

Participant Responses

Mark: The chart demonstrates that *how many percentage in different licenses in Australia due to sex in 1999*.

Carol: The Chart illustrates *the various types of high education certificates in Australia and the percentage between male and female who owned them in 1999*.

Tanya: The graph indicates *the proportion of the post school qualifications which men and women acquired in Australia in 1999*.

Vincent: The given information illustrates *the qualifications in the several levels in Australia, and it also reveals the proportion of men and women in 1999*.

Mary: This chart shows *the number of men and women difference between all kinds of qualifications of post school in Australia*.

Sylvia: The given graph indicates *the relationship between the certifications for Australian students highest diploma in five levels and the proportion of females and males who possessed them in 1999*.

Albert: The graph illustrates *the several levels of post-school qualifications in Australia and the percentage of males and females there during 1999*.

Lance: Given is a bar chart displaying *change that men and women was in five different degrees of post school qualifications in Australia in 1999*.

Eunice: The bar chart indicate *the percentage of both genders in the five levels of post-school qualifications in Australia in 1999*.

Claire: The figure indicates *the percentage of different genders who held the post-school qualifications of different levels in Australia in 1999*.

Making Feedback Effective in a Presentation Skills Class

By Debra Jones

Feedback is an important aspect of both teaching and learning. Giving and receiving feedback is regarded as essential for students to improve their performance and also plays a role in developing autonomous learning. However, to be effective, students need to read, respond to and act on feedback. In other words, feedback needs to be an active process which engages students and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. Most research in this area has considered feedback on written work. However, the same principles apply in a speaking context. This paper describes an attempt to create a system of effective feedback in a presentation skills class using a combination of teacher and peer feedback, and self-evaluation to facilitate active student engagement in the feedback process.

Introduction

Formative assessment is based on the notion that feedback is more effective in improving performance if given during the process of production rather than on the finished product (Wiggins, 2004). Its value has been well-documented in recent years building on the work of Black and Wiliam (1998) into the benefits of assessment for learning. Yet, despite the apparent benefits of formative feedback, teachers often complain that students do not read or listen to feedback, or, if they do, they rarely act on it, missing valuable opportunities for improvement (Duncan, Prowse, Wakeman & Harrison, 2003-04; Duncan, 2007).

Another common source of frustration for teachers is that students lack the necessary skills to be independent learners. This is particularly true in an East Asian context where university students have little or no experience of independent learning or critical thinking. There is some evidence to suggest that as well as improving performance, formative feedback can be effective as a way of developing learner autonomy (Murtagh & Baker, 2009), allowing students to “self-assess and self-adjust effectively with minimal intervention by the teacher” (Wiggins, 2004, p. 3). It would seem that formative feedback has the potential to

both enhance performance and foster learner independence, thus developing an effective feedback process could have considerable benefits for teachers and students.

This paper briefly reviews current theory on feedback for learning, and then describes an attempt to implement an effective system of formative feedback in the context of a presentation class at an international university in China.

Review of current literature

Feedback is generally recognized as essential to effective teaching and learning and teachers devote a great deal of time and energy to giving feedback. Traditionally, evaluation was something done after teaching and learning were over, as a judgment on the final product, or summative feedback (Wiggins, 2004). This was often in the form of a mark or grade. More recently, there has been more emphasis on feedback given on a work in progress, or formative feedback, which allows students “to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production” (Sadler, 1989, p. 119). Some advocates of this approach argue that feedback is more effective when it gives guidance for improvement without a grade being assigned (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Others highlight the importance of students acting on feedback

received (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-05), something made possible with formative feedback.

However, as studies have shown, and many teachers know from experience, simply giving and receiving feedback in itself will not automatically lead to improvement (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001; Carless, 2006; Duncan, 2007). To be effective, students need to be active participants in the feedback process, rather than merely passive recipients of advice and guidance (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-05; Murtagh & Baker, 2009). In addition, students need to be given an opportunity for self-reflection and self-evaluation in order to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning (Sadler, 1989; Weaver, 2006). Some research has explored the idea of feedback as a two-way dialogue between student and reviewer rather than a one-way, linear communication (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001; Carless, 2006). This encourages students to think about their learning needs and identify issues of concern.

The concept of a dialogue implies a cyclical rather than a linear process (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell & Litjens, 2008) or a feedback 'loop' (Wiggins, 2004) rather than a one-off response to a particular assignment. This notion of feedback as a continuum facilitates the concept of 'feeding-forward', defined by Duncan (2007, para. 1) as applying old feedback to a new task. While formative feedback is routinely used by writing teachers during the drafting and revising process, it is often seen as redundant on the final draft. Students are not likely to read or act on feedback on a final draft as they tend to see it as a finished product and, consequently, do not see how comments on a final draft could be useful to a future assignment (Duncan et al., 2003-04; Carless, 2006; Duncan, 2007). Adopting the idea of feedback as an ongoing process allows for feedback on a finished product to be carried forward to future assignments (Higgins et al., 2001; Hounsell et al., 2008).

The studies cited so far have focused on feedback on written work. Little research exists on the idea of using feedback dialogues and feeding-forward in the context of spoken English. Clearly there are differences between an essay and a presentation or discussion. Most significantly, unlike an essay, a speaking

activity is not a tangible product. Unless the event is recorded, once completed, it no longer exists to refer back to. However, students are generally given feedback on presentations in the belief that it will help them improve their performance, so it would seem that the same principles discussed above should apply. If the feedback is to be effective, students need to actively engage with and have the opportunity to act on it as a means of improving performance and becoming independent learners. This paper describes an attempt to devise and implement an on-going, interactive feedback system with the following aims:

Aims

1. To encourage students to act on the feedback given on an in-class presentation by feeding forward to the next presentation.
2. To use the feedback process to develop independent learning by requiring students to set goals based on feedback received.

Teaching context

The context was a Year 1 EAP class focusing on listening and speaking. Students were required to give three group presentations during the course of the semester. They were offered the opportunity to practice the presentation during a tutorial with the class teacher before presenting in front of their classmates and the teacher a few days later.

Students received no grade for these presentations. The purpose was to develop their skills and improve their performance in preparation for the speaking examination, which involved a five minute individual presentation. This seemed an ideal context in which to implement the assessment for learning approach of Black and Wiliam (1998), since feedback was given purely to emphasize positive qualities and highlight areas for improvement, not to assign a grade. Moreover, by setting the exam as the overall goal, each in-class presentation could be seen as a step on the road towards the final goal, rather than as a separate, self-contained piece of work. This created the opportunity for a cyclical process of feedback and feeding forward as described above.

Students received both verbal and written feedback from the teacher after the practice

presentation, and had the opportunity to act on this feedback in the final presentation a few days later. In the final presentation, students were given written feedback from both teacher and peers using evaluation rubrics. The teacher feedback included comments about improvements made since the practice presentation. Based on teacher observation, students generally did act on practice presentation feedback and show improvements in the final presentation. The challenge was to go beyond that and encourage students to carry forward final presentation feedback to the next assignment in order to maximize opportunities for improvement and play a more active role in their own learning.

Figure 1. Feed-forward form

Date:

Presentation #1: Final Presentation Feedback

What feedback did you receive from Presentation #1 (write both positive and negative feedback)

What would you like to improve in your next presentation? (Choose 2 goals)

- 1.
- 2.

Date:

Presentation #2

Look at the goals you set after Presentation #1. Look at the feedback you received. Have you achieved your goals?

- 1.
- 2.

Date:

Presentation #2: Final Presentation Feedback

What feedback did you receive after Presentation #2?

What would you like to improve in your next presentation? (Choose 2 goals)

- 1.
- 2.

Date:

Presentation #3

Look at the goals you set after Presentation #2. Look at the feedback you received after Presentation 3. Have you achieved your goals?

- 1.
- 2.

How did your presentation skills improve this semester? (Think of specific examples)

What are your goals for improving your speaking skills? How will you achieve this?

Procedure

The procedure adopted to facilitate an effective feedback process is described below:

Group presentation 1

Step 1: During the final presentation of Group Presentation 1, the teacher completed an evaluation form giving comments on content, structure, delivery (i.e. body language and use of voice) and use of visual aids for each individual student. Although the in-class presentations were group efforts, each student was evaluated individually since the final presentation would be an individual performance. In addition, classmates were required to give feedback using peer evaluation forms based on the same criteria. Peer reviews were anonymous to encourage more constructive comments and advice.

Step 2: After the final presentation of Group Presentation 1 (at the end of the class or the start of the next lesson), students were given time to read through all their feedback. Using the feed-forward forms (see Figure 1), they were then asked to summarize the feedback they received and set goals for the next presentation task (Group Presentation 2) based on the feedback. This step enabled students not only to read but to think about the feedback and make decisions about what they needed to improve.

Group presentation 2

Step 3: During the final presentation of Group Presentation 2, teacher and classmates completed evaluation forms as before (see Step 1).

Step 4: After the final presentation of Group Presentation 2, students reviewed their goals and decided if they had met them, thus introducing an element of self-assessment. The procedure in Step 2 above was then repeated. Students were given time in class to read both teacher and peer feedback from Group Presentation 2, summarize it and set goals for the next presentation task (Group Presentation 3). It can be assumed that the goals set were based on a combination of self, peer and teacher assessment, although it is not possible to assert which exerted more influence.

Group presentation 3

Step 5: Before the final presentation of Group Presentation 3, an additional stage was included in order to increase student interaction. Students were assigned another classmate as a 'feedback partner'. Before making the presentation, students discussed their goals from Group Presentation 2 with their feedback partner.

Step 6: During Group Presentation 3, the feedback partner was responsible for evaluating the student specifically on their stated goals. Each student also received teacher and peer feedback as before.

Step 7: After the final presentation of Group Presentation 3, feedback partners gave each other verbal feedback on how successfully they had achieved their goals. After that, students read the peer and teacher feedback. They were then asked to summarize and complete a self-evaluation of their achievements throughout the semester and identify their strengths and weaknesses. The feed-forward form provided a record of all the feedback received, goals set and achieved, and thus helped the students to make a more informed assessment of their progress.

Feedback on the final presentation of the semester could normally be perceived as redundant. However, in this case, the students were motivated to complete this step since the speaking exam would take place the following week. For the students, the exam represented the culmination of all their efforts throughout the semester; the ultimate goal of the feedback/feed-forward process. By creating the concept of feedback as a process, the relevance of feedback and self-evaluation on the final in-class presentation was more evident.

Conclusion

In terms of its aims, the experiment was a success since students were required to engage actively with feedback by summarizing and then comparing it with their own assessment of their performance. They were also encouraged to act on feedback by setting goals for the next assignment, then assessing

whether those goals had been met. In this sense, the first aim of feeding forward, or applying old feedback to a new task, was achieved. In terms of the second aim, setting their own goals helped foster an awareness of the need to take responsibility for their own progress, thus developing a degree of learner independence. As a possible extension in future, students could be asked to define what they need to do in order to achieve their goals, thereby taking the process of reflection and action one step further. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the goals set with the feedback received to see whether teacher, peer or self-assessment was more influential.

An additional benefit of the feed-forward forms was the opportunity for students to monitor their own progress through the semester by creating a written record of feedback received, goals set and achieved and future improvements needed. This promoted the idea of feedback as a continuous process as described earlier. Furthermore, the 'feedback partner' step introduced in Group Presentation 3 was effective in creating a dialogue between student and reviewer and also encouraging more student participation. In future, this step could be introduced at an earlier stage, for example during Group Presentation 2, in order to increase opportunities for a more interactive form of feedback. At present, the process described in this paper allows no opportunity for a dialogue between teacher and student and some mechanism for students to ask questions based on feedback should be included in future.

This experiment provides no evidence as to how or if students improved their performance over the course of the semester. Based on teacher observations, students did show improvement but it is not possible to say if the feedback system used contributed to this improvement. However, improving student performance was not the sole aim of this research. The main motivation was to go beyond the short-term goal of improving performance in the end of semester exam. The broader aim was to teach students something about the learning process itself and the need for them to play an active role in this process by taking responsibility for their own learning. The creation and implementation of a more student-centered feedback system was at least a step towards achieving this goal, so in this

respect the project can be judged a success. In addition, for teachers frustrated at students not reading, using or acting on feedback, it was rewarding to see feedback being used. Overall, from the perspective of teachers and students, a feed-forward approach to feedback has much to recommend it.

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The Attitude to and Practice of Grammar Teaching in EAP Courses

By Michelle Ives

The purpose and method of grammar teaching is often debated, although little research has focused on the role of grammar teaching in EAP courses. An investigation into teachers' practice of and attitudes to grammar teaching in an EAP programme was undertaken at a Sino-British university in China. Unlike previous research, this study also included the attitudes of subject teachers as key stakeholders in the learning-teaching process. It appears that, although there are few references to grammar teaching in the course documents, the majority of EAP teachers try to build the teaching of this into their course. Weaknesses in grammar affect student performance not only in EAP classes, but also in subject classes. Subject teachers played a larger role than expected in supporting EAP teachers in the teaching of grammar. However, there remains an inconsistency in how grammar errors are penalised in subject-class assessments. It is recommended that a more consistent and formalised approach is taken to the teaching of grammar in EAP programmes.

Introduction

As noted by Fotos (1998, as cited in Barnard & Scampton, 2008), it is now clear that communicative teaching alone cannot ensure grammatical accuracy. It is often noted that, although EAP students may be able to write an accurate reference list, they often cannot create a sentence without several grammatical errors. Although grammar is often assessed in EAP courses, the teaching of it is seldom built into the curriculum and, hence, it is believed by the researcher to be the reason that students frequently fall short in this part of their assessments.

This problem has also been noted in ESL teaching, with Muncie (2002) stating:

the place which grammar should occupy in composition classes is a confused issue, as EFL teachers on the one hand recognise that the stress in the methodology that reaches them is very much against grammar in favour of meaning and communication, while on the other hand students and curricula continue to place grammatical concerns at the forefront of their needs (p. 181).

The preferred approach to a grammatical focus in teaching is still being debated. Currently,

there is disagreement about whether to *focus on forms* (FoS) or to *focus on form* (FoF). The former is a more teacher-centred and pre-planned teaching of grammar which is based on the assumption that grammar is learnt in a systematic fashion. Such theories have long been discredited. As a result, FoS has been criticised when used as the sole form of grammar teaching. In response to the perceived deficiencies of FoS, Long (1997) suggests *focussing on form* (FoF) – where grammar is only addressed if it affects communication, and is therefore taught as and when the student needs it – as it is a more timely and student-centred approach (Barnard & Scampton, 2008; Muncie, 2002; Sheen, 2002; Gollin, 1998). However, it could be argued that while this approach is in keeping with more modern teaching practices, in courses that have assessments based on grammar, a FoF approach alone may not adequately prepare students.

Although there is debate about the purpose of grammar teaching, it is generally agreed amongst communicative language teaching (CLT) practitioners that grammar should no longer be taught at purely the sentence level; instead it should be taught more inductively as part of discourse and in context (Barnard & Scampton, 2008; Nunan, 1998; Petrovitz, 1997; Goodey, 1997).

Even though its importance is acknowledged, EAP teachers may feel that there are so many other skills for them to teach (such as using sources and writing accurate citations and references) that they have little time to formally address the problem of inaccurate use of language. There have been at least two surveys into EAP teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding grammar teaching: Burgess and Etherington (2002) in the UK, and Barnard and Scampton (2008) in New Zealand. Burgess and Etherington found that the 48 teachers surveyed "appear to see grammar as important for their students and have a sophisticated understanding of the problems and issues involved in this teaching" (as cited in Barnard & Scampton, 2008). This contrasts with Barnard and Scampton (2008) who stated that "the attention to grammar [by teachers] was secondary to other aspects of language, such as appropriate organisation of written texts" (p. 67). Moreover, in 2009, Tribble undertook a survey of EAP writing course books. Not one of these texts mentioned the teaching of grammar, nor did his research discuss this omission.

As a result of these findings, and observations from several years working as an EAP teacher, this researcher was led to ponder the role of grammar in the teaching of EAP.

Research procedure

This research took place at a Sino-British university in Shanghai, China. English is taught concurrently with major subjects during the first year, as opposed to being a pre-sessional programme.

As the EAP department's role is to enable students to function in English in subject classes, teachers of subject majors have a vested interest in this process. There is often a conflict between EAP teachers and subject teachers as a result of the students' poor level of general English. Native-speaker subject teachers, teaching majors such as economics, business or biology, who have to face written and oral communication difficulties with their students, may feel ill-equipped to deal with non-native speakers of English. They may feel resentment towards EAP teachers, whose job they feel is to better prepare the students.

The literature discussed previously did not investigate the attitudes of other stakeholders involved in the EAP teaching process such as subject teachers. For this reason a dual approach was used in this research, with questionnaires going out to both EAP and subject teachers.

Researcher's null hypotheses

- Grammar teaching is not the responsibility of the EAP teacher.
- Formal grammar teaching, defined as the conscious decision by a teacher to include a particular target grammar structure in their lesson plan, will not take place in EAP classes.
- Grammar errors will not affect a student's performance in subject classes.
- Subject teachers will play no role in teaching grammar.

Aim and research questions

This aim of this research was to define the role of the EAP teacher in regards to grammar teaching, by finding answers to the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are EAP teachers' attitudes to teaching grammar?
 RQ2: To what extent and how do EAP teachers teach grammar?
 RQ3: What role do subject teachers play in grammar teaching?

Questionnaire design and collation

Twenty-three invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent out to the EAP department teaching staff. This comprised 100% of the first year teachers at the organisation. The final return rate was 39% (9 teachers). Questionnaires (Appendix 2) were also sent out to subject teachers in all departments and the return rate for this group was 25% (16 teachers). The EAP questionnaire design (Appendix 1) was based on previous research, in particular that of Barnard and Scampton (2008). Due to the restrictions of the on-line survey software, the EAP questionnaire was created in two parts.

Findings and discussion

It should be noted that not all respondents replied to all of the questions. Nine teachers replied to the first part (Q1-10); 6 replied to the second.

EAP teachers: Attitude to grammar teaching

Most (78%) EAP teachers who responded believed that it is the EAP teacher's role to teach grammar either as part of error correction / feedback or as preparation for other work (for example, a listening task). None believed it was only the job of the high-school English teacher. The majority (60%) thought that more of a grammar focus should be built into the Scheme of Work (SOW). The reasons for this varied from the frequency of student errors to being part of a more holistic teaching approach, as this respondent explains: "The grammar shouldn't be the focus but the support system which provides the rationale of the language". This is echoed by Thornbury (1999) who cites the 'rule of usage' – teach grammar not as to an end in itself but to help learners understand and produce real language. One teacher acknowledged that the current system of students learning grammar independently is not working: "they seem to find it difficult working on their own time". Another made this strong statement: "it's neglected. We assume students have a solid grammar base when many of them don't".

In addition, most respondents commented that they would like to see more grammar activities that are contextualised and integrated within the four skills. This agrees with research by others (Nunan 1998; Petrovitz 1997; Goodey 1997). The reasons why some teachers rarely taught grammar or would like to teach more, but did not, were split evenly between "not having enough time in class / in the course" and "grammar not being part of the SOW". Some comments also related to issues of student and staff-workload, for example, "the students are already inundated with homework and I am equally snowed under with marking so my recommendations of 'do more grammar and I'll check it for you' don't come to much" and "requires a lot of prep time to be integrated effectively".

EAP teachers: Practice of grammar teaching

The most common class that had a grammar focus was Academic Writing, followed by Speaking and Discussion Skills, that is, the productive skills classes. A wide range of grammar activities are used by EAP teachers, the most common being student-generated errors and teacher-created worksheets. General grammar book exercises were the least popular. Although none of the teachers built a grammar focus into every lesson, all teachers taught it in their classes in some way, mostly when needed to help students complete other work (78%). Thornbury (1999) agrees with using student-generated errors as teaching material as it ties in with his 'Dogme' (low-technology, student-centred) approach. He believes that especially in monolingual L2 classes, as at the institution where this research took place, students recognise their mistakes in others' work, as they are often the same result of L1 interference. Just as important, using student-generated errors as teaching material reduces the class preparation time for a teacher.

Although all EAP teachers who responded to this question (6) asked their students to buy or have access to a grammar book, the majority (67%) had never asked their students to use their book in class, and rarely assigned homework from it (83%). In addition, only one teacher would refer a student to their book if they encountered a grammar problem in the class. They would instead teach / revise the point in class, but only if perceived to be a common problem. Although approximately a quarter of EAP teacher respondents would help the student during class time, none of them would arrange to tutor the student after class. This could be related to the workload issues previously mentioned.

In terms of more independent work, 67% of the EAP teachers who answered this question encouraged students to use the 'grammar check' feature of Word, and, of these, most had either shown or explained its usage to their students. Teachers' correction codes for written work also generally gave the students constructive feedback by identifying the grammar errors by type and some teachers use different levels of feedback according to the needs of their classes. Barnard and Scampton (2008) also found a wide variety of error correction techniques in their study, from one teacher having a reasonably thorough

approach, “I will circle and underline mistakes, but I don’t rewrite things for them”, to a more minimalistic approach to avoid undermining a student’s confidence, “picking up too many errors at once can make a student feel their writing is beyond correction”.

Subject teachers: Grammar problems and teachers’ reactions

Subject teachers across the four majors encountered a wide range of English problems in their classes. The responses tended to relate to a general lack of English skills, not only to grammar. Lack of vocabulary and problems with face-to-face communication with the teacher and other students were mentioned, with one maths teacher noting “[there is] no mandate [from the Institution] to speak English so conversational skills are stalled”, while another suggested teaching “how to raise questions and issues in a positive way ... help with linking words / phrases [as they] lack vocabulary thus affecting the three basic skills in EAP – writing, speaking, listening”. This finding is similar to the study by Evans and Morrison (2010) who found that their Hong Kong students had difficulties with academic writing and subject-related terminology.

When students did have problems, 81% of the subject teachers who responded said they helped them with grammar themselves, though four teachers would ignore the problem, believing their job was to focus on content. Surprisingly, nearly twice as many would direct students to a grammar text or website rather than refer them back to their EAP teacher.

Subject teachers: Attitudes to EAP and grammar teaching and the penalising of English errors in assessments

The teaching of grammar seems to be viewed as a shared role, with nearly half of the subject teachers seeing grammar teaching being the role of both the high school and EAP teacher, and 40% thinking the subject teacher should also play a role in this. Neither EAP nor subject teachers considered that the responsibility for grammar teaching should end with the high school teacher.

The majority (63%) of subject teacher respondents stated that their department did not penalise for linguistic errors in

assignments. Of those departments that did, the amount ranged from “50%” to “a small amount and only if I can’t guess which word they should be using or it still doesn’t make sense”. However, it should be noted that this question did not specifically relate to grammar errors. Moreover, such errors, when penalised in subject assessments, are usually only one part of a more general assessed concept of ‘presentation’ or ‘style’, so it is difficult to determine the actual effect poor grammar alone has on the final grade.

Conclusion

The sample size of this study was limited, so further studies are needed to provide sound evidence. However, from the results it appears that the majority of the null hypotheses were proven to be rejected. The responsibility for grammar teaching was not felt to end once a student leaves high school; on the contrary this research showed that it continues to be an area needed to be taught within an EAP programme. Although grammar is often not taught formally, it is addressed in EAP classes using a FoF approach. Grammar weaknesses can affect the teaching-learning experience within subject classes, so subject teachers also have a vested interest in how grammar is taught. Institutional factors, such as externally-created syllabi and differing views between subject departments in terms of penalising linguistic errors, also need to be taken into account when discussing the best approach. The attitudes to the method of grammar teaching and error correction among teachers are diverse, yet a return to the inclusion of formalised, generalised teaching of common areas of grammar weakness (FoS) is suggested to ensure students at similar institutions have a good grammatical grounding and that teaching better matches assessments.

Recommendations

Although this research relates to a particular Sino-British institution, the findings may be applicable to other EAP courses in China. The following general recommendations can be applied to institutions where EAP is taught alongside other subjects.

Pre-course preparation is vital. Entrance exams and summer courses should have a

strong grammar component so students have a good grounding before the EAP course proper starts. Focus group meetings comprising of student representatives, subject teachers, and EAP teachers should be held at the start of the year to explore how grammar can be better taught and to determine common areas of grammar weaknesses to be addressed.

A more formalised teaching of common grammatical problem areas should be built into the SOWs. It is suggested that this be in a contextual and task-based manner and presented within a piece of discourse, with practice given within an assigned writing or speaking task. However EAP teachers should be encouraged to tailor this suggestion to meet class needs. Students should be given the tools for independent learning. Where necessary meta-language should be taught to enable students to use grammar books and understand teacher explanations and feedback. A good understanding of the methods used for identifying and correcting errors, including correction codes is important. An appropriate grammar book, used in class as part of the formal grammar teaching, for student reference, and / or as part of assigned homework, and the directing of students towards online grammar sites are other ways to ensure working independently is possible. When problems occur, small group feedback can be given during tutorial slots built into the timetable.

Within subject classes, there should be greater standardisation across teaching departments concerning the penalising of grammar and other linguistic errors in assessments. Further research also needs to be carried out to investigate the vocabulary teaching needs raised by subject teachers in this study.

This pedagogical topic is complex; the purpose of grammar teaching and the 'best' method are continually debated by practitioners and researchers alike. To further complicate matters, it is important to consider that, even if formal grammar teaching is incorporated into an EAP programme, it still does not address the major problem of linguistically adapting to different expectations within different text genres, disciplines, and departments. Evans and Morrison (2010) found that there is a "need to understand and appropriate the discourse practices of the

disciplinary community they [students] have chosen to enter" (p. 9) and recommend using key subject genres to contextualise the teaching of grammar. The cultural context in which the teaching occurs is paramount, so a "one-size-fits-all" approach to grammar teaching is not possible, nor appropriate. EAP teaching is still developing and faces several challenges; where grammar fits in to the syllabus is but one of them.

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Appendix 1

EAP teachers' questionnaire and raw results

EAP Teachers' Questionnaire		
1. How long have you been teaching at ?		
	% response	N
3 months	11	1
1 year	22	2
1.5 years	11	1
3 years	33	3
4 years	22	2
2. What classes do you teach?		
Gao kao only	0	0
Non-gao kao	56	5
Both	44	4
3. What are your TESOL qualifications? (You can choose more than one)		
CELTA / Cert.TESOL	88	7
DELTA / Dip. TESOL	25	2
MA	50	4
4. What EAP skills classes do you teach at SBC? (You can choose more than one)		
AW	89	8
AR	67	6
SDS	89	8
LNT	56	5
5. Regarding grammar, do you think it is the role of the EAP teacher to: (You can choose more than one)		
Teach it explicitly (i.e. in class) for all students as part of a scheme of work (SOW)	44	4
Teach it incidentally in class (e.g. as preparation for a reading activity)	67	6
Teach it as part of error correction / feedback in class	78	7
Teach it remedially for individuals to improve their ability	44	4
Teach it remedially for students / classes at risk of failing	22	2
Only highlight grammatical errors for students and suggest they learn / revise grammar independently	11	1
Have nothing to do with teaching grammar - this is the high school English teacher's job	0	0

6. In general, how often do you explicitly teach grammar (i.e. focus on a language point) in class?

I try to build in a grammar point into all of my lessons	0	0
In any class, when needed as a preparation for other work	78	7
Remedially in any class	56	5
When preparing for the exams	56	5
If it is part of the SOW or teaching materials	56	5
Never (PLEASE GO TO Q10)	0	0

7. If an individual student brings up a grammar point (and there is time to focus on it in class) do you usually: (Choose one only)

Bring it to the whole class's attention and teach / revise the grammar point	11	1
Bring it to the whole class's attention and teach / revise the grammar point only if you think it is a common problem	56	5
Bring it to the whole class's attention and refer them to their grammar books	0	0
Plan to teach the point in the next class explicitly	0	0
Plan to give homework related to the grammar point in the next class	22	2
Help the individual student during the class	11	1
Refer the individual to their grammar book	0	0
Arrange for a time to tutor the relevant student	0	0
Ignore it	0	0

8. What kind of grammar activities do you do IN CLASS? (You can choose more than one)

Exercises from a general grammar book	22	2
Exercises from an EAP grammar book	44	4
Self-created grammar exercises	67	6
Examples of student errors for correction	78	7
Peer marking of written work focussing on errors	33	3
Identification and correction of errors from T-created materials	56	5
Writing or speaking activities incorporating the target structures	33	3
Grammar games e.g. grammar auction	44	4
Never focus on grammar in class	0	0

9. In which classes do you tend to have a grammar focus?

AW	89	8
AR	22	2
SDS	56	5
LNT	11	1
Never have a grammar focus	11	1

10. When marking written work, does your error correction code / feedback: (Choose one)

Just tells students to check their grammar	0	0
Identify the grammar errors by type (e.g. missing article)	44	4
Highlight the grammatical errors but doesn't identify the type of error	0	0
Highlight the errors and provide the correct grammar	11	1
Use different correction techniques according to the level of the student	44	4
Never mentions grammar	0	0

11. Do you encourage your students to use the Grammar Check feature of Microsoft word?

Yes	67	4
No	33	2

12. If yes, have you explained / shown your students how to use the Grammar Check feature?

Yes	75	3
No	25	1

13. Do you ask your students to buy / have access to a grammar book?

Yes	100	6
No	0	0

14. If yes, how often do you ask the students to use their grammar book IN CLASS?

Never	67	4
Rarely	33	2

15. How often do you assign grammar homework?

Never	0	0
Rarely	8	5
Sometimes	17	1
Often	0	0

16. Do you think more of a grammar focus should be built into the SBC EAP SOWs?

Yes	60	3
No (go to Q19)	40	2

17. If you'd like to see more of a grammar focus, why is this?

- Because students make frequent grammar errors. They also need to be able to use more complex grammar e.g. present perfect, conditionals, modals etc.
- The grammar shouldn't be the focus but the support system which provides the rationale of the language. Therefore, grammar can help improve the accuracy especially in writing and have a better understanding of the language.
- The students have a lot of problems with grammar and seem to find it difficult working on it in their own time (this may be because of a lack of time).
- It's neglected. We assume students have a solid grammar base when many of them don't.

18. If you'd like to see more of a grammar focus, what kind of grammar activities/ teaching would you like to see in the SOWs?

- Proper exercises for passive. Review of verb tenses functions/ rules etc. Basically the 'sophisticated grammar' they are supposed to use as graded in speaking and writing exam criteria.
- Grammar should be embedded in the texts relevant to their subject study and should be taught in a communicative way.
- It should be integrated with the different skills (especially reading and writing).
- Exploring grammar in context - e.g. grammar used in model essays, language used in actual presentations, discussions etc.

19. If you don't teach grammar or would like to teach it more often but don't, what is / are the reason(s) for this? (You can choose more than one)

Not enough time in class/ in the course	67	4
It's not part of the SOW	67	4
Are not provided with any materials for it	33	2
Students not interested in learning about grammar	17	1
Don't feel confident teaching it	0	0
It's not the EAP teacher's role	17	1

Other (please specify):

Not enough time for this particular focus

To be more specific the students are already inundated with homework and I am equally snowed under with marking so my recommendations to do more grammar and I'll check it for you don't come to much. I do try to add quick explanations as and when they seem to fit.

- Requires a lot of prep-time to be integrated effectively

Appendix 2

Subject teachers' questionnaire and raw results

Subject Teachers' Questionnaire

1. How long have you been teaching at SBC?

	<u>% response</u>	<u>N</u>
Less than one year	25	4
1-2 years	44	7
2-3 years	6	1
3+ years	25	4

2. Which department do you teach in?

Biz / Economics	44	7
Engineering	19	3
Events Management	6	1
Maths	31	5

3. Which year(s) students do you teach?

Year one	56	9
Year two	44	7
Year three	13	2
Year four	19	3

4. What are TWO main problems your students have with their English and what areas do these affect (e.g. writing)?

Speaking and reading.

●Speaking weakness will affect when they have questions, it is hard for them to tell what are the questions. reading weakness will affect: when the questions has a long sentence, it is easy for them to misunderstanding the question.

●Lack of vocabularies thus affecting three basic skills in EAP (writing, speaking and listening).

Speaking and writing

1. Difficulty in extracting the essential information from articles. It could be seen as the inability to do speed reading, although this is obviously very difficult in a foreign language. It appears that all information is given equal weight. This carries over into their writing, where they have difficulty in getting to the core of an issue and bringing out the core of an issue in their writing. I have seen this problem with new graduates in industry many times.

2. How to raise questions and issues in a positive way. They need help with the language to use when they raise a disagreement.

3. And one small one. They could use help with what I call linking words/phrases. Those that can be used to bring together two issues, or thoughts, e.g. "as well as", "together with", "in addition".

● Like all kids, they can't make a logical argument in any language, even their own. Some of the problems emerge from English and some from logic.

● Note taking and explaining concepts verbally. I feel all aspects of the language are affected. Poor listening skills have a detrimental effect on the students ability to study in their own time and ask relevant questions.

● 1. Lack of interest 2. Poor vocabulary

● Student's vocabulary do not try to understand EVERY word in a sentence.

● Organisation of essays inability to properly reference and paraphrase.

● Understanding of questions understanding of the teacher.

● Speaking - communicating with teachers and other students in class. Writing - often constructing sentences can be problematic for some students.

Writing & Reading

● No mandate from SBC to speak English so conversational skills are stalled

● Vocabulary - affects writing and speaking sentence structure - affects writing

● Understanding questions (reading) communicating face-to-face (speaking-confidence)

● Difficulty with abstract terms - comprehension Use of words no native English speaker would use - from translation dictionary?

5. In general, what do you do if a student has problems with their English?

Refer them back to their EAP teacher (if still studying EAP)	25	4
Refer them to an appropriate textbook or website	44	7
Help them yourself	81	13
Ignore it - your job is to focus on content	25	4

6. Do you penalise for English errors in your assessments?

Yes	38	6
No	63	10

7. If you penalise, on average what % of the assignment is English worth

50% of the final project mark is based on writing.

Small; and only if I cannot guess which word they should be using, or it still doesn't make sense. They need warning to re-read after they have used the spell checker. Only penalise if the intended content is not clear- I would estimate that about 5% of overall content is incomprehensible

Depends on the assignment - between 10-20%

25% for overall presentation (including English)

Writing assignments usually have a section for written English - maybe 5-10%

8. In your opinion, whose role is it to teach / revise general English skills e.g grammar and general vocab?

The high school teacher	0	0
The SBC EAP teacher	13	2
The high school teacher and the EAP teacher	47	7
The high school teacher, EAP teacher, AND subject teacher	40	6

9. In your opinion, whose role is it to teach Academic English Skills (e.g. giving presentations, using sources, writing a bibliography, discussion skills)?

The EAP teacher's role	20	3
The EAP and the subject teacher's role	80	12

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Implementation of a Peer Observation Programme for Teacher Development

By James Richard Lee

It is common for TESOL institutions to have an observation system in place whereby managers observe teachers in the classroom and provide feedback on their performance. The benefits of such a system with regard to teacher development are, however, dubious. Here I would like to propose the introduction of a peer observation programme which incorporates a shift from top-down to bottom-up observation procedures according to guiding principles from literature. It is contended that collaboration among colleagues, which would incorporate the sharing of expertise and exploration of teaching beliefs, leads to the building of mutual trust. Although concerns about collaboration and reflection processes may need to be addressed, it is hoped that such a programme will eventually result in increased trust, collegiality and professionalism among its participants.

A New Approach

Bottom-up vs. Top-down

This proposal for a peer observation programme is an attempt to move away from observations carried out by those in supervisory roles for assessment or appraisal, and to move towards observations carried out

by colleagues in a supportive environment. It wishes to avoid the trainer-centred observation identified by Williams (1989) among others, in which there is a focus on what is considered good or bad practice. In traditional forms of observation the teacher's role is to remain the passive recipient of advice or criticism (Cosh, 1999). Many teachers' view of observation remains thus, often as a hangover from their pre-service training. Kumaravadivelu (2012) advocates moving towards an era of post-method in which teachers assume greater responsibility for their own development. He suggests that the traditional top-down approach to teacher education fails to address teachers' specific requirements, and instead leads teachers to perform classes which are geared towards the ideals of the institution rather than the aims of the teacher (or indeed, the needs of the students). His proposal is for a more interactive and multidimensional paradigm which incorporates development of a knowledge base, analytical skills, recognition of beliefs and reflective practices. It is hoped that a bottom-up peer observation system would be closer to this ideal than many current observation systems. As Freeman and Johnson (1998) state, teacher development should focus on the teaching itself; more specifically, the teacher, the context and the pedagogy. It is acknowledged that although this is a long-term

and complex process, the desire to reflect on and understand one's own teaching is at the core of teacher development.

Guiding Principles

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) identify a number of suggestions for successful peer observations put forward by teachers themselves. They highlight the need for a friendly, supportive environment and acceptance by all parties that successful observation needs sufficient time allocated to it. Richards (n.d.) proposes guidelines (including for each participant both observing and being observed, and holding pre- and post-observation meetings) in his account of a successful peer observation programme in Hong Kong, which gave teachers a number of insights into their teaching practice and inspired some to make positive changes. Similar ideas are suggested by Richards and

Farrell (2005), who go on to identify practical ways in which administrators and supervisors can provide support for those teachers involved in the process. Their advice includes consulting with teachers prior to the implementation of the programme to discover what resources, administrative support or time might be required. Another idea is to hold workshops which allow teachers to reflect on the programme. The above advice has all been incorporated into the programme plans (see 'Key Changes' and Table 1, below); however it should be made clear that any involvement on the part of administration is purely to provide such support as is requested, and not to take part in, nor choose the focus of, the observations themselves. It is crucial that teachers have a free rein to decide what is to be observed – the teacher, the students or the learning context (Cosh, 1999). Malderez and Wedell (2007) emphasize that it is important to consider carefully the process needs of the

Table 1. Key Changes

Criteria	Typical programme	New programme
Number of observations	1 x observed by line manager	2 x observed by peer
	1 x observed by peer	2 x observed by peer
	(Annual)	(All completed within one semester)
Obligation to participate	Obligatory	Voluntary
Collaborative workshops	None	2 per semester
Observation schedule	No fixed schedule	Structured schedule over 1 semester
Pre- and post-observation meetings	No	Yes
Suggested follow-up activities	None	Workshop and conference Presentations
		Journal articles
		Action Research projects
Used for teacher evaluation?	Yes	No

participants on the course; in other words, teachers need time to try out (and reflect on) new ideas, and to feel comfortable doing so, and this should be fundamental to the design of the programme. For this reason, the course described below has been designed to include regular observations within a time frame which allows for teachers to meet regularly; however it also gives them sufficient time to reflect on the observations.

The Programme

Key Changes

The principal aim of this programme proposal is to introduce a peer observation system within a TESOL institution. It takes as its starting point a typical top-down observation programme and proposes a number of key changes (see Table 1).

The most significant changes are:

- That observations should be conducted by peers only. Teachers should, as far as possible, choose their own partner with whom they wish to collaborate.
- Participation in the course should be entirely voluntary.
- The programme would take place over the course of one semester. Participants would be free to take part in both semesters if they wish.
- A workshop would be held at the start and end of each semester. The first would explain the process, suggest observation and feedback activities and focusses, and identify any administrative support which may be needed. The second would be a chance for participants to report back on how successful they found the programme, and to make any suggestions for further improvements.
- Teachers would observe their partner twice, and be observed by the same partner twice. This equates to four observations per semester, or one every three weeks (excluding exam weeks).
- Teachers should meet pre-observation to discuss the planned class and agree on a focus for the observation, and should also meet post-observation to discuss any issues which arose.
- Teachers would be encouraged to use the

peer observation system as a tool for small (or larger-) scale action research and to write up their experiences for their own professional development review, for publication, as a mini-presentation for colleagues within workshops, or for presentation at conferences.

- Observations would not be used for evaluative purposes; however, participation in the scheme could be considered to be evidence of a commitment to Personal Professional Development.

Observation Activities

In order to facilitate collaboration and encourage reflective practice, or indeed to collect data for research, participants will need to select suitable observation activities. Naturally, they should reflect the focus of the observation. There are a wide range of activities available for teachers - Wajnryb (1992) and Wallace (1998) are excellent sources of observation ideas. In addition, Bailey (2006) provides a detailed study of manual data collection procedures, such as field notes.

Before the observation (in the initial workshops and/or in pre-observation discussions) it is important to establish teacher beliefs. Appendix 1 is based on an activity proposed by Johnson (1999) which encourages teachers to reflect on some commonly-held beliefs about teaching. It has been adapted to encourage teachers to work together and discuss these beliefs collaboratively. Appendix 2 (Wajnryb, 1992) is a similarly effective activity as it uses a rating scale for provoking discussion about classroom practice. Courneya et al. (2008) showed their research participants two different classes on DVD and asked them to rate how effective the teaching was in each example. A similar approach could be used on this programme in order to generate discussion about teaching beliefs.

Richards (1998) provides a list of ideas for the focus of observations, such as teacher time-management, teacher questions and student responses, student performance during pair/group work or investigating classroom interaction patterns. Appendix 3 is an example of a data collection sheet for recording interaction patterns¹. This kind of observation task does not involve any evaluation of the

teacher; the observer is simply acting as an assistant to the teacher by recording data which the teacher would like to critically reflect upon. The focus is on bottom-up collaboration, as opposed to traditional top-down checklists of 'good practice'. Video can also be used to record certain kinds of activity, and may be useful for teachers' self-reflection; nevertheless having an observer in the class allows the participants to share inferences and opinions (Bailey, 2006) particularly in post-class feedback.

Collaboration Leading to Greater Trust and Increased Professionalism

Collaboration and Sharing of Expertise

A major benefit of the programme would be to foster increased collegiality through collaboration between teaching staff. As TESOL departments expand, it could be argued that the sense of community (Richards, 2010) among staff becomes fragmented, and isolation increases. Re-establishing the teaching community would have a number of benefits. Johnston (2009) promotes co-operation among teachers as a fundamentally social process which leads to professional development. Cosh (1999) suggests that mutual support among teaching colleagues can lead to increased confidence, enthusiasm and a willingness to experiment. Bailey (1996) notes that collaborative dialogues with colleagues enabled course participants on a teacher development programme to consider their own teaching practices in a new light. This peer observation programme enables the establishment and/or development of relationships between teachers of varying backgrounds and beliefs, with varying degrees of expertise and experience. Central to this is the understanding of expertise – Tsui (2003) has identified characteristics such as automaticity of response and efficiency in planning. If, as Freeman (2002) states, teacher learning remains a life-long quest to improve and find meaning in one's work, then the sharing of effective practices among colleagues is invaluable. He points out that for teachers to fully explore this, they need to be able to both reflect critically and articulate their experience. The programme, by placing teachers in the position of both observer and observee, aims

to provide teachers with the skills to do both. Furthermore, teachers have the opportunity to learn from observing their colleagues in the classroom and applying that to their own practice.

Exploring Beliefs and Building Trust

Pre-observation discussions are important for teachers to clarify how exactly they would like the observation to proceed and what they would like the observer to focus on. These discussions also enable teachers to explore each other's teaching beliefs. This concurs with the ideas of Borg (2009) who has pointed out that in constructivist theory there is an explicit link between teachers' prior experience and their current learning. Johnson (1999) also contends that teachers' beliefs rarely alter, even when they take part in professional development courses. As Borg (2009) states, teaching beliefs are unobservable and may require detailed examination in order to be identified. Discussion before and after observation can help teachers to uncover their own beliefs, while peer observation itself can be used to investigate whether their practice matches their beliefs. It would seem to be crucial to the success of the peer observation programme that observation pairs are able to trust each other, and that exploration of each other's teaching beliefs is a chance to build that key element of trust.

Collaboration and Reflection Issues

On the other hand, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) have identified a number of valid concerns which lead to what they claim is a lack of focus when it comes to peer observation. These include time constraints, limited scope, ideological fuzziness and teacher resistance (particularly when participation is compulsory). They make the valid point that we must be careful to ensure that any culture of collaboration is genuine. They state that what they term *contrived collegiality* is counter-productive as it simply involves teachers working together because they are forced to do so by their institutions. Cosh (1999) provides examples of peer observation schemes linked to appraisal and pay rises in the UK and USA which were unsuccessful because of a perception that they were introduced from

above, and the teachers did not exert any control over the process. Clearly this is a situation to be avoided. Nevertheless, the voluntary nature of the programme, in addition to the opportunities for undertaking intrinsically motivating action research, will hopefully lead to an increased sense of ownership among staff. Research has shown that most teachers have a clear preference for bottom-up, rather than top-down, observation procedures in any case, which should also serve to mitigate these concerns (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011).

There is also the danger that some teachers may not be ready for the reflective aspect of the observation procedure. Roberts (1998) notes that while novice teachers are likely to respond to reflective activities with varying degrees of success, experienced teachers also have difficulty discussing their own teaching. However, a willingness to participate in the scheme would demonstrate openness to new ideas. The programme would hope to introduce such teachers to these reflective processes and through the contact they have with other experienced educators, help them to develop those skills. The collaborative workshops are an important part of this process. Richards (2010) also acknowledges that a change in mindset may be needed among some teachers, but emphasizes that for those who are willing to embrace collaborative teaching, the benefits are both personal and professional and an important step towards becoming a more integrated part of the teaching community within the institution and beyond.

Increased professionalism

Despite the above concerns, the fact remains that a peer observation programme is potentially a step towards increased professionalism. Leung (2009) differentiates between sponsored (or institutionally-endorsed) professionalism and independent professionalism. While assessor-based observations are an example of sponsored professionalism, peer observation is an opportunity for more reflective practice, a key component of independent professionalism. In the former the teacher's creativity may be stifled by the scrutiny of the institution, thereby reducing professional autonomy.

Conversely, reflective examination is crucial to raising professional consciousness as it allows teachers the freedom to develop according to their own goals. Richards (2010) suggests that teacher support groups, discussion groups and action research can all be an integral part of critical review and reflection. Peer observation can incorporate all three of those elements.

Conclusion

Institutions strive to be learning communities. Brandt (2003), in support of his claim that student achievement is linked to professional development of teachers, states a number of ways of identifying 'learning organizations'. In particular, such institutions should exhibit supportive organizational cultures, be respondent to change, and collect and use information to help achieve their goals. Although a peer observation programme would require a significant investment of time and commitment on the part of both an institution and the participants, there are many potential benefits. The programme can encourage teachers to work together, taking responsibility for their own and their colleagues' professional development. It can build trust and collegiality among staff, and provide important reflective skills. It can transform the observation procedure from a process in which staff feel nervous and uncomfortable into a real chance to demonstrate and develop professionalism. In short, it is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to what extent the institution represents a modern learning organization.

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Appendix 1

Pre-observation activity A

Read the following statements:

Teachers teach the way they were taught.

There is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to teach.

Teachers learn to teach by teaching.

More experienced teachers are better teachers.

Teachers are born, not made.

Make brief notes on each of these statements and state why you agree or disagree with each. With a partner/In a group, discuss why you agree or disagree with each statement. Reflect in writing on your discussion. Try to identify one new insight from your discussion. How does what you discussed relate to what you do in the classroom?

Adapted from: Johnson, K. (1999, p.41) *Understanding Language Teaching: Reasoning in Action*, Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle

Appendix 2

Pre-observation activity B

By way of preparation, consider your own beliefs about learning tasks. Consider the following six statements relating to the features of good learning tasks and circle the appropriate number on this scale.

- 0- not a characteristic of a good task
- 1- this characteristic is optional
- 2- this characteristic is reasonably important
- 3- this characteristic is extremely important
- 4- this characteristic is essential

Good learning tasks should:

Enable learners to manipulate and practice specific features of the language.	0	1	2	3	4
Provide an opportunity for learners to rehearse communicative skills they will need in the real world.	0	1	2	3	4
Involve learners in risk taking.	0	1	2	3	4
Involve learners in problem-solving or resolution.	0	1	2	3	4
Be process- as well as product-orientated.	0	1	2	3	4
Offer learners choice.	0	1	2	3	4

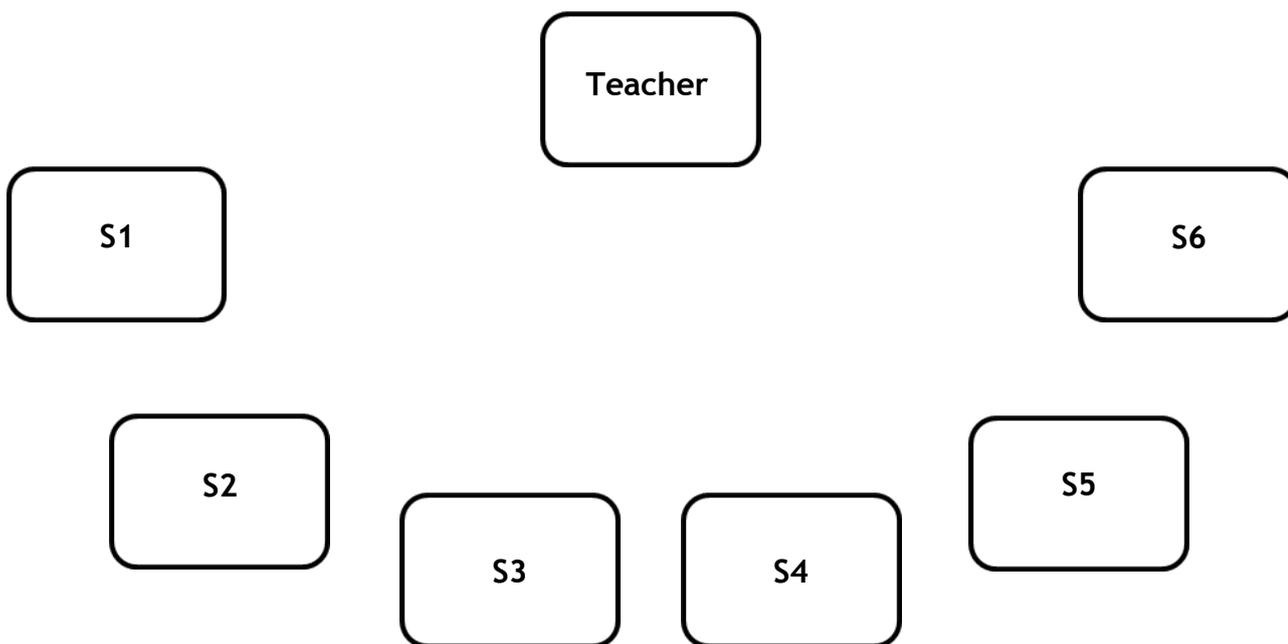
Are there any other characteristics that you would consider essential to a good learning task?

Taken from Wajnryb, R. (1993 p.133) Classroom Observation Tasks: A Resource Book for Language Teachers and Trainers, Cambridge: CUP

Appendix 3

In-class observation task

Use lines and arrows to show the interaction and communication patterns which occur during the class.



Thinking in Chinese, Writing in English

By Trevor Wadlow

A familiar situation in a Lower Intermediate class at a Chinese university might follow this pattern. The students have spent the last three weeks working on the structure of the expository text. Their first attempt at writing one has been marked and graded. All texts are structurally sound. Many paragraphs contain a topic sentence and a concluding sentence. Some have attempted to write compound and complex sentences, but most have not. Some even resemble high school essays, replete with simple sentences. Worse, many sentences are direct translations from the Chinese. Numerous causes can be cited for this problem. To name just two: fossilisation (in which the student somehow 'freezes' at a certain stage of learning the L2) and fear of failure or 'loss of face'. A number of surveys have shown that the majority of syntactical errors made by Chinese learners (especially lower level students) derive from L1 interference. One report (Chou & Bartz, 2007) even suggests that, given the vast linguistic difference between English and Chinese, the solution to the problem lies in the deployment of non-native English speaking teachers as only someone familiar with the difference can really address it.

Any or all of these potential causes may be at play in the above situation and some teachers despair at this point. However, there may be a single solution to this multi-faceted

problem. During a discussion about Chinese culture, a Chinese teacher pointed out that Chinese students had a tendency to compartmentalise things. When practising reading skills they did not automatically associate the exercise with speaking or writing. In other words, when reading they were engrossed totally in meaning rather than communication. It did not occur to them that the text might be the kind of writing to which they could aspire. Another possible reason for this compartmentalisation is 'cultural interference'. It is well known that the Chinese education system sets great store on relentless testing. This can breed a strictly utilitarian approach to any exercise placed before them, from real tests to simple gap-fill exercises. This is evident in the way that many students fail to go beyond controlled exercises to full-blown production. For example, most students understand the conditional form and can easily complete an exercise in it, but in my five years as a teacher and an examiner I have rarely heard it spoken or seen it written.

This discussion was still fresh in my mind when I took my Lower Intermediate class. I had assembled a short text about studying abroad in Australia and created a few questions. The gist reading and skim and scan went as smoothly as always, which is not necessarily a good thing. Again, it occurred to me that students complete such exercises with the

same unreflective approach as they would a crossword: to be done quickly and efficiently, and then promptly forgotten about. I was just about to set them to searching for specific information when something occurred to me. As a large section of the lesson was to be taken up by checking their research notes for a forthcoming presentation, I knew there was time for me to implement a change, try something different. I started with a question, one that was certainly unexpected for them.

“What do you think of this piece of writing?”

The entire class looked back at me blankly, though this did not surprise me. I then followed with, “OK, do you think you are capable of writing to this standard?”

They seemed now totally unsure how to respond. I smiled. “I think you are. At least, I think you should aim for this standard.”

I looked down at the text and quickly scanned the first paragraph.

Australia is one of the Earth's unique places. Although it gets very little rainfall, its vegetation and resources have sustained one of the oldest existing peoples, the Aborigines, for over 50,000 years.

I then issued the following instructions: change the subject to a Chinese city. Then change everything else accordingly – noun, verb, adverb, adjective. Change everything except the sentence structure. I assigned it as a group task and initially allowed them twenty minutes. This turned to thirty minutes as I wandered around the class to monitor their efforts. The first sentence was transformed easily, which I am sure inspired their confidence.

Shanghai is one of the Earth's unique places.

Of course, everywhere is unique to some extent so a mere word change was unlikely to give them problems. The second sentence was more problematic until I pointed out that they did not have to find some kind of equivalent to ‘oldest existing people’, that the aim was to come up with a significant piece of information about Shanghai. After careful monitoring and discussion one group finally produced the

following:

Although it is not as famous as London or New York, its rapid development has made it one of the most important and exciting cities in the world.

I watched as they paged through dictionaries and discussed possibilities with each other, actively hunting down the lexis they needed. Instead of treating it as just another exercise (to be completed like a jigsaw then quickly discarded) they took it seriously. They were forced to engage with each sentence and by changing the subject they were fully focussed on the structure, meaning and function. This paragraph:

The first stop will probably be Sydney, which is a busy city offering a wide range of artistic, historical, culinary, and sporting opportunities. Located on a magnificent natural harbour on Australia's Gold Coast, Sydney is home to the famous Harbour Bridge and the towering Opera House. The Gold Coast is known for its beautiful beaches and sub-tropical attractions. It offers a wonderful climate, with mild winters and warm, sunny summers.

was transformed to:

The first stop will probably be the Bund, which is a busy avenue offering beautiful scenery and numerous examples of world architecture. Located on the embankment of the Huangpu river, the Bund is home to over twenty magnificent buildings, including the famous Peace Hotel. The Bund is known for its wonderful views and excellent restaurants.

The final sentence stumped most of the students, until one came up with:

It offers tourists the chance to enjoy a wonderful, relaxing day out.

Though this did not entirely follow the sentence structure I let it pass. What mattered was that they owned the language and were gradually becoming more confident

about complex and compound sentences. I noted how they underlined each new sentence as they studied it, absorbing its meaning before putting it to their own use. By this time the lesson was almost over. I quickly checked their research notes for their Presentation and set the remaining two paragraphs of the text for homework.

Later in the week I reviewed this exercise and was told that students liked it because it made it impossible for them to think in Chinese. It also made them feel that quality writing, complete with compound and complex sentences, was well within their grasp. This was encouraging but I also noticed how much it exercised them in other ways: passive forms, new lexis, relative clauses, collocation – a wide range of strategies, in fact.

In the weeks that followed I saw a distinct improvement in their writing. Many textbooks teach new structures in a decontextualized manner, and then encourage students to use them. This can involve a good deal of error correction. My approach, on the other hand, placed new structures in context but also allowed the students to move towards production at a much earlier stage. This does not mean that there was no need for monitoring or error correction (verb/noun problems still persisted, for example) but it did allow the students to feel more in control. Subsequently, instead of finding easy and familiar ways to communicate they were more likely to take a risk and try one of the more complex structures they had learned. Occasionally they would lapse. When this happened I would take the exercise a step further by instructing them to buy a copy of Shanghai Daily, find an article that interested them and change the subject in order to transform it into an article on a different subject. Of course, allowing them to choose what to transform had even more effect on their motivation. I concluded that for this kind of class – low level, lacking in confidence, fearful of losing face before their more proficient friends in other classes, and constantly taking the easy route via L1 – this kind of exercise is a possible way forward. Following this simple experiment I am now considering structuring all lessons around a central text and integrating comprehension and writing more closely.

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Foreign Teachers, Chinese Students, and “English for Different Purposes”

By Joel Heng Hartse

Introduction

Why do Chinese university students study English? Two reasons students often mentioned when I asked my classes this question several years ago were China’s entry into the World Trade Organization and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. These “global” reasons for learning English are related to the perception that, because it is a world language, “learning English will enable Chinese citizens to access international research and development, to use advanced methods in industry and business, and to learn from foreign countries” (Cheng, 2011, p. 134). Such abstract, overarching purposes, however, are divorced from the immediate concerns of particular students. At the beginning of our careers in China, many foreign teachers are aware of China’s general strategy of embracing English for modernization and development, but we tend not to know as much about the goals, desires, and needs of our students; in fact, foreign teachers often enter their classrooms knowing little about how students will need to use English in their studies and future lives. In my time teaching in Chinese universities, I found that understanding what students want and need from English writing instruction can be especially difficult for those not familiar with the Chinese education system.

While there are individual variations in students’ abilities and needs in any context, I noticed one striking difference between groups of students at two universities where I taught English writing recently: they were anxious to improve their writing, but for two very different reasons. Learning more about these differences has, I hope, made me more sensitive to students’ needs in China and elsewhere.

English Majors at a Small College: Writing to Pass the TEM

During my first year in China, I worked at a small college where most of my students were English majors. The college could be considered a “third-tier” institution, a college under the supervision of the local municipal government, as opposed to second and first-tier colleges, which are under provincial and national supervision, respectively (Niu & Wolff, 2004). Tuition is over three times that of the local second-tier university with which it shares a campus, and the college admits students who perform relatively less well on (or even “fail,” as I sometimes heard students say) China’s National College Entrance Exam (NCEE), or *gaokao*. The college’s foreign language department is responsible for teaching English to thousands of students, and many courses focus on standardized English exams, such as

the CET-4 (College English Test, Band 4) which all non-English major college students in China take, and the TEM-4 (Test for English Majors, Band 4), which English majors take.

The college's English writing course, which I taught to four classes of 45 English majors each, was considered preparation for the writing section of the TEM-4, although the assigned textbook was not exam-focused. The TEM, along with other standardized tests, was a frequent source of anxiety for English majors at the college, as was the CET for non-English majors who perceived it as very important for their chances of graduating and obtaining employment, since exam scores are often considered by employers in China (Zhao & Campbell, 1995). As You (2004) points out, the importance of English examinations in China places a great deal of pressure on teachers and students alike; the efficacy of English teaching is "evaluated almost exclusively by the results of students' scores on the CET" and "students' individual needs for English are hardly acknowledged" (p. 108).

Like many beginning foreign teachers, I was unfamiliar with the TEM and CET, but assumed that my training in teaching English writing would be satisfactory; I had students write journals, led them through the traditional "writing process", introduced peer review, and so on. It was not until halfway through the first term that I found the students had been given a booklet of essay templates by the department, which they were encouraged to memorize for the exams¹. At first, I was shocked; I had not known this was a common and accepted strategy for exam preparation. Ultimately, I felt unable to teach the template, but the experience showed me that simply "teaching good writing" the way I had been trained to in the U.S. would not be satisfactory in China. I tried to learn more about the prompts used on the TEM, introduced more practice timed writing tests, and adjusted my teaching to be less process-oriented.

Elite University Students: Writing for Study Abroad

After learning of the importance of standardized English exams, I thought I had

figured out how best to teach college writing in China. I was surprised, therefore, to find that students in my courses the following academic year, when I taught at one of the top-ranked universities in the country, did not seem to share the same preoccupation with the CET and TEM as their counterparts at the smaller college. In fact, I do not recall a student mentioning either exam to me in class or private conference. Some contextual factors may account for this; my courses at the university were electives in "advanced" writing (in contrast to my course at the college which was required for English majors), and the university is nationally recognized as an elite institution welcoming students with high previous academic achievement. Nevertheless, the difference was not one I had anticipated. Instead of asking about strategies for writing the Chinese standardized exams, students frequently came to me with questions about writing for international exams like the TOEFL, IELTS, or GRE, how to write personal statements for North American university applications, and the expectations of western professors. Many of them also took additional courses related to English for studying abroad through schools like New Oriental, a popular private training institution. In short, the university writing students seemed, generally, focused on the development of their writing abilities in service of the goal of future graduate studies in English-speaking countries, whereas most of the students at the college seemed more interested in developing their writing to avail themselves of the social and economic opportunities it might allow in China.

Though the two groups of students were in the same country, their needs and goals were quite different. Since Zhao and Campbell (1995) suggest that the primary function of English in China is not, in fact, its use in international communication, but for the "practical benefits of being in college and consequently finding a job, which may or may not require the use of English" (p. 384), I became curious about the students at the elite university, since it appeared that their goals for English writing differed from those of what might be called the "average" Chinese student. As a result, I informally interviewed some of

¹These are similar to those described by Ma (2012).

them to learn more about their hopes for writing courses². Many talked about wanting to learn more about writing for their own majors, rather than improving their general writing abilities, and also about the perceived cultural differences between academic writing practices in China and abroad.

The idea of learning about English writing “culture” might suggest that students would respond positively to writing courses taught by foreign teachers (several students explained that they took my course specifically because I am not Chinese), but Rui (a pseudonym), a third-year student, expressed disappointment with a class he took from an American teacher:

The teacher of that class taught us to write outline before writing. Then he tried to let us write fictional and non-fictional article. I think it is too difficult for us. He required that the articles should be more than 4 pages. Actually, I [was] more interested in how to write the letters or applications, but not interesting stories.

Rui hoped to learn about genres like graduate school applications, research proposals, and resumes, but said that in most of his English classes, teachers “told us to write things that are not ‘necessary’ for us. I would not put a lot time on them”. Rui also mentioned enjoying a course he referred to as “English for major”, in which he learned about writing “different kinds of academic paper”. His negative experience with the foreign teacher and positive experience in an EAP class may have contributed to his desire for instruction better tailored to his goals:

I think teacher should know what the students really need. Then help them to write that things and judge. For example, many students want to learn how to write resume ... I think people will be interested in what they need. Many useful English writings are not difficult, but western people have different way to write it ... Teachers should let students know it.

Rui did not suggest that a western teacher would be better at teaching the “different way” of English writing outside China, but his answer shows a perceptive awareness of the difference in function and/or features of academic writing in different contexts. Rui’s statement that “western people have different way to write it” was striking to me: it implies that there is a Chinese way of writing English, and this, I realized, was what many of my students at the smaller college had needed to master in order to do well in their undergraduate courses, to pass the CET, TEM, and other exams, and to satisfy the gatekeeping requirements of English in China (Gil & Anderson, 2011). What Rui and many of his peers in the elite institution seemed to want, however, was more instruction in navigating the differences between academic English writing in China and overseas.

Conclusion

There have been a number of studies published about the experiences of foreign teachers of writing in China since the early 1980s, from Matalene in 1985 to Shi in 2009; the teacher’s dearth of knowledge about the local context is a common theme. For many foreign teachers, this lack of explicit knowledge may lead to pessimism and frustration, but it can also be seen as an opportunity to take responsibility for learning more about the local educational context(s) from students’ perspectives. Spack (1997) criticizes the way in which “Chinese students” are constructed by western scholars through (mis)readings of research and unreflexive accounts of culture and writing practices, and calls for language teaching professionals to “examine our own identities, to own up to the position of power from which we name students, and to find room in our pedagogy and scholarship for students to name themselves and thus define and construct their own identities” (p. 773). Indeed, rather than speaking generally about “Chinese students” or making generalizations about “teaching English in China”, we should recognize that there are many types of higher education institutions – and students – in

²Interviews with six students via instant messaging and email are described in Heng Hartse (2009).

China. Understanding these differences, more than generalizations about how and why “Chinese students” learn English, should prove useful for new foreign teachers in China; perhaps we should adopt the acronym “EDP” – English for Different Purposes – as a reminder that Chinese university students have different goals and imagined futures.

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Book Review: A Student's Introduction to English Grammar

Layla Nichole Shelmerdine

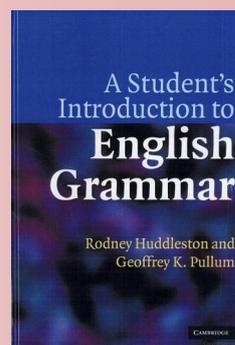
Authors: Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum

Publisher: Cambridge University Press, First Published 2005

Available: Amazon.co.uk, £17.59 (paperback)

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Pages: 320



A Student's Introduction to English Grammar by Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum (2005) follows from the authors' earlier work *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002). It is an extensive overview of English grammar that takes a refreshingly descriptive view. According to the preface, *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* is intended for those students who have little or no background in English grammar and 'presupposes no linguistics'. The book is divided into 16 chapters (see below), and each chapter is divided into subsections.

Each chapter lists the subheadings that will

1. Introduction
2. A rapid overview
3. Verbs, tenses, aspect, and mood
4. Clause structure, complements, and adjuncts
5. Nouns and noun phrases
6. Adjectives and adverbs
7. Prepositions and preposition phrases
8. Negation and related phenomena
9. Clause type: asking, exclaiming, and directing
10. Subordination and content clauses
11. Relative clauses
12. Grade and comparison
13. Non-finite clauses and clauses without verbs
14. Coordination and more
15. Information packaging in the clause
16. Morphology: words and lexemes

be covered in that chapter, which makes for a quick search for particular grammar items or information. Examples that are given for each topic are simple and easy to understand. The range of grammatical topics discussed is diverse and extensive and the chapters are, for the most part, logically subdivided from the biggest grammatical category to its constituent parts – from sentence level to word level (as in the case of Ch. 2) – or from constituent parts to clause level (comparative and superlative word form to comparative clauses in Ch. 12). At the end of each chapter, there are exercises reviewing the topics covered in that chapter.

For English as a Second Language (ESL)/English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students or students new to the study of grammar, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002) is generally more accessible than *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar* (2005). In *A Student's Introduction*, the authors make clear that common usage is the benchmark for what they consider grammatically appropriate; i.e. common usage is the standard as opposed to a formerly established grammar rule when the two are in disagreement. This is illustrated in their inclusion of a *Prescriptive Grammar Notes* section in each chapter, which is very helpful in clarifying appropriate grammar usages where there is some obfuscation between rules and

actual usage (e.g. the acceptance of the semantically singular **they**, p. 105). The end of the book features a very thorough glossary of terms and the further reading section, which helpfully contains recommendations for both general readers and linguistics students.

Probably the biggest disappointment for students in this book is that the end-of-chapter exercises have no answer key. This leaves students reliant on their teacher to double-check any of the exercises they have questions about. Having the exercises after each subtopic and example, instead of at the end of the chapter, might also make for an easier review since there are several subtopics covered in each chapter. Furthermore, students may find an imbalance between the extensive explanations and the relatively few exercises per topic, which could make working through the whole book somewhat tedious for very little reward (in this case, an opportunity for extended practice of any one part of grammar).

It is clear that because of the extensive explanations and technical vocabulary, a student or teacher needs native or near-native levels of competence in English to comprehend the book, which leads to questions as to its usefulness for second language learners. Although stated to be for students with no background in English grammar or linguistics, the terms and definitions are very technical and prolific, which seem to indicate that students should have more than a passing familiarity with some of the terms. For example, 'mood' is mentioned (pp. 41-42) before it is fully explained (p. 53). Furthermore, although the examples given are easy to understand, the explanations are exhaustive, which is useful for teachers and English/linguistics students; however, for English language learners, even with some knowledge of grammar, this can present difficulties in comprehension.

Those working in the field of World Englishes

might question the authors' understanding and application of the term **Standard English**: '...for the vast majority of questions about what's allowed in Standard English, the answers are clear' (p. 2). What is considered Standard English is far from clear. In their descriptive approach the authors acknowledge linguistic variation but it is limited to variations from native speakers. Additionally, the exercise section for Ch. 1 asks students to distinguish between standard and non-standard usage. Therefore, it is unclear how much of the grammar content and explanation took into consideration research in second language learning. The book also makes a judgment as to what is a standard and a non-standard variety of English (p. 156).

A Student's Introduction is an excellent reference for teachers or English/linguistics students but it is not very ESL/EAP-student friendly. Moreover, as there is no theory and no classroom application instructions, it will be most useful to teachers and advanced English students as a grammar reference guide. This book is well-designed and very thorough in its treatment of English grammar. Generally speaking however, *A Student's Guide* is more useful as a guide for teachers than students.



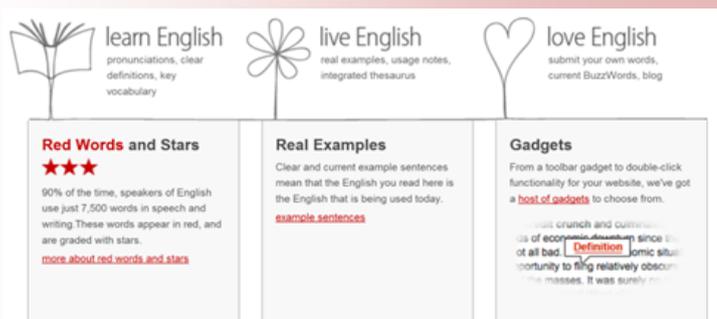
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This section highlights some useful learning and teaching websites that can help with planning, teaching and professional development. This time we look at dictionary resources.

Macmillan Dictionary

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



Many institutions use a set dictionary so students are able to learn new vocabulary from the same source. One common choice is Macmillan Learners' Dictionaries.

Macmillan has recently decided to embrace technology fully by halting publication of its paper-based dictionaries and focus instead on digital versions. The online Macmillan Dictionary offers its users

a 'quick search' facility, including a button for pronunciation, and links to a thesaurus. Core words are highlighted in red and come with a star rating to identify their usage frequency. Definitions are clear and include appropriate example sentences.

The Macmillan site also includes a number of games and supplementary exercises. The *Irregular Verb Wheel Game* is a valuable resource which tests learners' knowledge of various verb forms. *Word of the Day* provides students with vocabulary they may not otherwise come across. New words can also be found in *Buzzwords*, which illustrates the usage of these new words in context.

The Dictionary is linked to social media via Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, which does mean that many of the sources are restricted for users in China. A further disadvantage is that the banner ads are distracting. However, the site has many other links which also warrant further investigation, including a blog with commentary on a variety of issues. Overall, the site is not only very useful for learners but also for teachers.

Oxford Dictionary of Collocations

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

The Oxford Dictionary of Collocations appears online in a similar format to the print edition. Learners can enter a word in the search box and results are returned with a variety of language forms. For example, the word 'situation' returned collocations with adjectives, verbs, prepositions and phrases. Some sample sentences are also provided, which is helpful in clarifying usage.



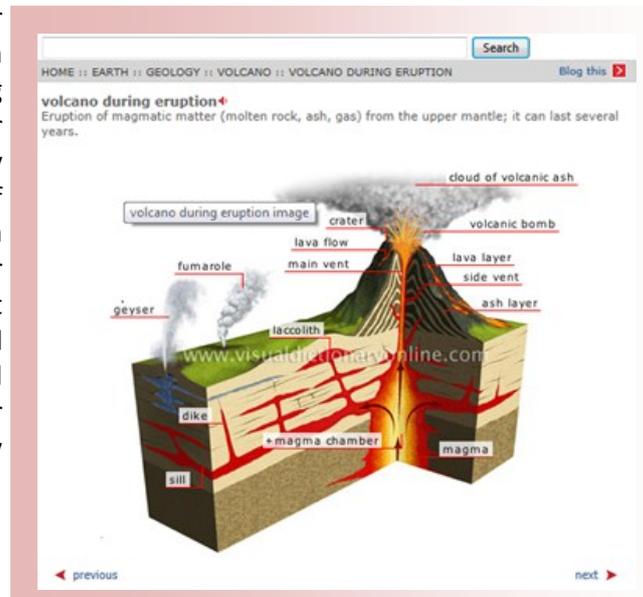
Awareness of collocations is extremely beneficial to all learners of English, although results offered by this site do not necessarily distinguish less academic collocations from more formal language which some users may require. The website also benefits from being devoid of any distracting advertisements, which allows the learner to focus on the task at hand.

Merriam-Webster Visual Dictionary Online

<http://visual.merriam-webster.com/>

This online dictionary provides detailed definitions of 20,000 terms using more than 6,000 images and covering 15 major themes, including energy, science and architecture. Each image shows an object, a process or a phenomenon with the terms provided for each of its key parts. Users may click on any highlighted term for a written definition, and on a speaker icon to hear the pronunciation. While the themes cover both academic and general topics, the topic areas are limited, so this would be useful more as a supplementary resource rather than as a replacement for the traditional dictionary.

Although not specifically designed for learners of English, the site could be used both in the classroom, particularly for teaching specific subject-area vocabulary, and for students' self-study. The format would clearly be beneficial for visual learners, and the use of images to explain meaning may be helpful in encouraging language students to avoid either learning or recording definitions through direct translation. Additionally, the theme-based organization of the content may be beneficial in encouraging students to take a similar approach to organizing their own vocabulary recording.



EasyDefine

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



This website has been designed as a time-saving tool for those frustrated with the amount of time spent searching for definitions of individual words. It allows users to paste a list of words into its search facility, whereupon it will provide an instant definition of every word in the list. Definitions are taken from Princeton University's WordNet® lexical database of English. Unfortunately, the definitions have not been designed specifically for language learners, and the definitions of words with several meanings do not appear in order of usage frequency. Therefore, teachers using the site to create material for their students may need to spend time editing the definitions to be more user-friendly for such learners.

Nevertheless, teachers may still find this a considerable time-saver; key benefits being the facility to search not only for definitions but also to look up synonyms, download flashcards or create instant vocabulary building exercises (six different types of exercises are offered, including true or false definitions), all generated from the users' own word lists. Furthermore, such features could be recommended to higher-level students to encourage learner autonomy in self-study, although teachers may wish to suggest supplementing the definitions with resources more catered to language learners, such as an advanced learner's dictionary which provides examples of usage. The site also offers the option of logging in, enabling users to save and organize their word lists according to topics.

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Did you know...

English language teaching (or *ELT* as it's more commonly known) seems to be plagued by a daunting number of acronyms. You probably know what the most common stand for, such as *EFL*, *TEFL*, *ESL*, *EAP* and *ESP*. However, what about some of the others? Below is a list of some that you may (or may not) have come across. Test your ELT acronym knowledge by filling in the blanks.

(Answers at the bottom of the page)

1. **TESOL** T _____ E _____ S _____ O _____ L _____
2. **EGAP** E _____ G _____ A _____ P _____
3. **ESAP** E _____ S _____ A _____ P _____
4. **TBLL** T _____ B _____ L _____ L _____
5. **TBLT** T _____ B _____ L _____ T _____
6. **CLT** C _____ L _____ T _____
7. **EIL** E _____ I _____ L _____
8. **ELF** E _____ L _____ F _____
9. **ELL** E _____ L _____ L _____
10. **EAL** E _____ A _____ L _____
11. **ESD** E _____ S _____ D _____
12. **SLA** S _____ L _____ A _____
13. **CALL** C _____ A _____ L _____ L _____
14. **MALL** M _____ A _____ L _____ L _____
15. **TELL** T _____ E _____ L _____ L _____
16. **VLE** V _____ L _____ E _____
17. **DELTA** D _____ E _____ L _____ T _____ A _____
18. **IELTS** I _____ E _____ L _____ T _____ S _____
19. **TOEFL** T _____ O _____ E _____ F _____ L _____
20. **TOEIC** T _____ O _____ E _____ I _____ C _____

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages / English for General Academic Purposes / English for Specific Academic Purposes / Task Based Language Learning / Task Based Language Teaching / Communicative Teaching / English as an International Language / English as a Lingua Franca / English Language Learners / English as an Additional Language / English as a Second Language Acquisition / Computer Assisted Language Learning / Mobile Assisted Language Learning / Technology Enabled Language Learning / Virtual Learning Environment / Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults / International English Language Testing System / Test of English as a Foreign Language / Test of English for International Communication.

Chinese Corner

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

Class is *kè* (课) in Chinese. Therefore, you may often hear your students enthusiastically announcing *shàngkè* (上课), meaning to begin class, or *xiàkè* (下课), to finish class, when it starts or ends.

The literal meanings for the words *shàng* (上) and *xià* (下) are 'up' and 'down', and are used in many different circumstances in Chinese. For example, you will often hear *shàng* and *xià* when getting on and off the bus, in the phrase *shàng chē* (上车), to get on to the bus, and *xià chē* (下车), to get off. They can also be used to signify 'last' and 'next', as in *shàng gè yuè* (上个月), meaning last month, and *xià gè yuè* (下个月), next month.

Back in the classroom, some other useful terms are 'student', 'university' and 'school', which all include the Chinese word *xué* (学), meaning to learn or study.

'Student' translates as *xuésheng* (学生) and 'school' as *xuéxiào* (学校). However, do not confuse this *xiao* with the one meaning 'small' that you find in *xiǎo xué* (小学), or primary (small) school. You will also find this pattern in *zhōng xué* (中学), meaning middle school, and *dàxué* (大学), meaning university, its literal translation being 'big study'.

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

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