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Letter from the editor

Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure in announcing the release of the September issue. We can also update our readers about new international recognition for the Arab Word English Journal (AWEJ). AWEJ is now recognized and indexed also by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) http://www.doaj.org/doaj?func=openurl&issn=22299327&genre=journal, The University of Hong Kong Libraries-Centenary http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/ER/detail/hkul/3811038, Macquarie University, Sydney Australia http://www.researchonline.mq.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/mq:20196, and the Scientific Repository of King Saud University http://repository.ksu.edu.sa/jspui/handle/123456789/18247, as well as others.

Furthermore, AWEJ has reached an agreement of cooperation to publish special refereed issues for two conferences in the region this year - Sudan TESOL 2012 conference and Arab Open University Conference 2012. AWEJ has also received invitations to participate in several international conferences. Members of AWEJ team will be keynote speakers at these Conferences.

Finally, we would like to apologize to our colleagues whose papers did not appear in this issue because of the large number of submissions. In particular, we would like to assure those who have been notified of acceptance pending further revision that as soon as they have addressed these revision requests their papers will be published as a matter of priority in upcoming editions.

Kind Regards,

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Critical Thinking and the Language Factor: 
The Case for the English Language Learner

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Abstract

Critical thinking is considered an essential ingredient for academic success; however, there is a tendency at times to equate the non-native speaking students’ lack of language proficiency with a lack of cognitive ability and critical thinking skills. The goal of this paper is to make a case for NNS students and demonstrate that they are capable of critical thinking, reflection, and scientific skepticism, just like their NS counterparts. The paper argues that NNS students may not initially display critical thinking because their main objective is to gain linguistic accuracy and fluency. In this process, critical thinking takes the back seat temporarily. The paper also questions the proposition that critical thinking ought to be taught as a separate skill and argues that students must instead be exposed to sustained academic content in order to develop in-depth knowledge about the issues before they are able to evaluate them.

Keywords: critical thinking, second language learners, Bridge programs, ESL, EFL.
1. Introduction

Learners of English as a Second or foreign language are often criticized for their poor English skills, their tendency to memorize and plagiarize, and most importantly for their lack of critical thinking abilities that their native-English-speaking counterparts are sometimes assumed to have been born with and socialized into (Atkinson, 1997). Such perceptions might point to a long-standing assumption that Western-based education practices are far more superior to those found in other countries, although there is no convincing evidence that students from the Western hemisphere are of a better caliber than their foreign counterparts as a result of their environment or the type of learning practices to which they have been exposed (Vandermensbrugghe, 2004).

Such attitudes towards LL2 (second language learners) often neglect to take into account the language factor when referring to these learners as deficient in critical and analytical thinking skills. The fact that LL2 are required to not only think in a language that they are still struggling to learn but to also become critically and analytically competent in this language is at times unfortunately assumed to be a prerequisite for intelligent thought.

College educators view critical thinking as an essential skill for academic success, but is every college student in the Western hemisphere blessed with such skills? More importantly, do international students for whom English is a second or foreign language lack this gift simply by virtue of having grown up in cultures that apparently do not promote critical thinking? Is critical thinking an essentially Western aptitude or U.S. middle class social practice that learners from non-Western cultures are apparently incapable of (Atkinson, 1997)? More importantly, is critical thinking a set of skills that can easily be taught in the EAP, “Bridge” or first-year writing classroom or any classroom for that matter, or is attempting to teach these skills to LL2 in particular a futile undertaking? These are the core questions that this paper will attempt to address. In addition, this paper will also attempt to make the case that LL2 are capable of critical thinking, reflection, and scientific skepticism. It will argue that LL2 are not deficient in critical thinking skills, and by the same token native speakers of English students are not all endowed with these skills simply because they grew up in the West. A discussion of why LL2 do not show evidence of critical thinking skills while still learning the English language will follow. Finally, the paper will re-examine whether critical thinking can and / or ought to be taught and will consider some of the current classroom teaching practices that might be antithetical to promoting critical thinking in the college classroom.

2. The Language Factor:

Critical thinking has been used as a slogan and a buzzword by many educators who argue that it is at the core of Western education and a fundamental factor for academic success in American universities in particular (Atkinson, 1997; Benesch, 1999; Davidson, 1998; Pennycook, 2001). But what is exactly the type of critical thinking that many educators want to bring into the English language classroom? Is it appropriate or even possible to actually teach it to non-native English learners? In general, critical thinking-skills consist of one’s ability to see more than one side of an issue, to reason from logic rather than from passion, provide substantive evidence in support of one’s arguments without discounting new evidence that conflicts with one’s ideas, as well as develop the ability to evaluate and synthesize information (Davidson, 1998; Pally, 1997; Willingham, 2007).
Existing definitions of critical thinking can be divided into two broad categories. The first category describes critical thinking as "the process by which we test claims and arguments and determine which have merit and which do not" (Ruggiero, 2004, p. 17). In other words, critical thinking consists of the major skills used to accomplish a variety of academic tasks, such as information processing, inquiry, reasoning, creative thinking, and evaluation skills—all of which are crucial for academic success. According to this definition, to be a critical thinker is to engage in a critical discussion of "texts," which may include several genres and means of expression: news, web pages, movies, music, art, advertising, political speeches, etc. In academic literacy, a critical thinker also implies one’s ability to display in-depth critical analysis and evaluation of texts by being able to not only decode meaning from texts, but more importantly to understand the impact of such texts on society. To possess this type of critical thinking is to have the ability to question and challenge these texts and their writers.

The second definition of critical thinking has a more political scope, for it defines critical thinking as the ability to question and challenge conventional knowledge and the status quo, a definition which is inspired by Marxist theories that encourage the examination of histories and social realities to uncover hidden forms of domination and exploitation (Freire, 1970; Tollefson 2002; Benesch; 1993b, 1999 & 2009). Along these lines, Benesch (1993b) defines critical thinking as the search for social, historical, and political roots of conventional knowledge and an orientation to transform learning and society.

The type of critical thinking this paper is concerned with, however, is not necessarily of the ideological type that Benesch and the others above advocate. This paper is primarily interested in the practical kind of critical thinking skills that are enhanced by English Language and Bridge Programs with the aim of preparing students for academic success at the university level. Additionally, the paper also questions the power relations in academia and argues that many traditional pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning are flawed and do not contribute to helping students develop their critical thinking skills. Granted, the political and apolitical types of critical thinking are sometimes hard to distinguish; still, the aim of this paper remains the examination of “academic” critical thinking with the goal of primarily questioning the assumption that LL2 might be incapable of critical thinking due to having grown up in environments that apparently do not promote critical thinking (Atkinson 1997). Additionally, the paper also explores and questions the validity of the notion that critical thinking ought to be taught in EAP classes in particular as a means of preparing LL2 for academic success at the university level.

3. The “Atkinson” Approach

The most controversial approach to critical thinking, as it applies to LL2, in the last two decades, remains one advanced by Dwight Atkinson (1997) in his article “A critical approach to critical thinking.” In that article, Atkinson claims that critical thinking is a non-teachable social construct acquired only through an unconscious process of childhood socialization. Atkinson describes critical thinking as an essentially Western concept, or rather a U.S. middle class phenomenon, hence implicitly suggesting that learners from non-Western cultures may not be capable of critical thinking ways due to their cultural values that favor community consensus in place of individualism (Atkinson, 1997). Rather than directly alleging that LL2 are incapable of critical thinking, Atkinson’s article indirectly makes the case that only those who grow up in Western societies and are socialized in critical thinking skills from an early age are capable of showing evidence of such skills later on. Therefore, according to this approach, non-native
speakers of English seems to be deterred by their cultural backgrounds from developing critical thinking skills, an argument reminiscent of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir, 1921 & 1929; Whorf, 1956). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is suggestive here as it contends that cognitive activity is determined by language, and therefore non-Western-language speakers, and in particular non-English speakers, are prisoners of the languages they speak, which determines how they perceive and think about the world around them.

Following this theory, Atkinson goes on to argue that any attempt at teaching critical thinking to students who come from cultures that do not promote this cognitive skill is worthless. Atkinson calls into question the efficacy of teaching critical thinking because this skill is acquired only by a select few who happen to be born and raised in Western cultures where critical thinking is inherently promoted and encouraged. Atkinson’s view generated a great deal of debate among professionals in the field of EAP especially, who countered with their own arguments against promoting uncritical teaching and learning in the classroom (Gieve, 1998; Raimes & Zamel 1997; Spack, 1997 as quoted in Benesch, 1999).

Although I agree with Atkinson on the inefficacy of teaching critical thinking in EAP contexts, I disagree with the premise of his claim. Contrary to Atkinson’s claim that international students may not be capable of critical thinking as it is defined above, based on personal experiences as a language learner and teacher in both ESL and EFL contexts, (and due to the evident dearth of research in this area), I would argue that international students in IEP / EAP programs may not yet have the opportunity to think critically or produce material that shows evidence of critical thinking because their main concern is primarily linguistic. In other words, LL2’s primary goal is to develop their ability to communicate their thoughts and most importantly be understood by their counterparts. As such, tending to their L2 issues (including organization of ideas, form and grammar) in their papers in an effort to produce intelligible content takes precedence over critical and analytical thinking. As a result, deep insight and analysis, originality, sound argument, and skepticism become generally disguised by the main objective to master the language in order to communicate effectively. This is a matter of prioritizing, not an inability to use critical thinking; as a result, critical thinking takes a back seat in the learning process, at least temporarily.

Furthermore, the fact that critical thinking might be a social practice (Atkins, 1997) does not necessarily make it an exclusively Western aptitude. Willingham (2007) argues that “Virtually everyone is capable of critical thinking and uses it all the time… The difficulty lies not in thinking critically, but in recognizing when to do so, and in knowing enough to do so successfully” (p.18). In the same vein, Pally (1997) maintains that international “students, of course, come to the ESL classroom with a variety of critical thinking skills developed in their L1s and they gain L2 critical thinking skills outside formal study” (p. 299). Thus, critical thinking tends to be a socially individual practice rather than just a social practice. Individuals from the same social and cultural background can differ significantly in their critical and thinking skills; otherwise, the ongoing call to teach critical thinking would have ceased long ago. That might also be the reason why 80% of native English speakers in Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995 study (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995) were not all found to be equally endowed with the gift of critical thinking.

The same can be said of individuals who come from non-Western cultures: some may tend to be more comfortable expressing critical thinking in their L1 than in other languages – some, for instance will have the tendency to question authority whether it is embodied by another individual (parent or teacher for example), by an institution (school or governments), or by a text
(a book or a film) more than others from the same community. Others may tend to be satisfied with the status quo and will grow up to be part of a shared community without ever questioning its values or principles, regardless of the culture where they were born and raised.

Oftentimes, there are generalizations put forth to describe certain groups, such as the “Asians being more reticent,” (Vandermensbrugghe, 2004) which can be interpreted as the result of their being brought up in a system that does not tolerate criticism and therefore does not promote critical thinking. In the case of LL2, the language factor and the initial culture shock and the time it takes to acclimate to a new culture (silently) are hardly ever taken into account although they probably play a far more important role in this debate than often realized or acknowledged.

Being critical does not necessarily entail possessing critical thinking abilities. In the same way, being reticent and reserved when it comes to voicing opinions does not necessarily mean that one lacks the ability to think critically. In a Western context, children will challenge and criticize their parents and teachers, which might be construed as an opportunity to nurture critical thinking. In most non-Western cultures, on the other hand, challenging or criticizing one’s parents or teachers is frowned upon and considered nothing more than a sign of disrespect and poor education on the part of parents and society at large. No wonder then that many students from non-Western cultures have harsh words for their Western counterparts for the total lack of respect they display towards their teachers, parents and the elderly (Kohls & Knight, 1994).

Secondly, coming from a teacher-fronted classroom where the teacher is generally viewed as the source of knowledge and the student as the passive recipient of this knowledge might initially play a role in some students’ inability or unwillingness to display critical thinking. However, as soon as these students become proficient in their second language, acclimate to the classroom culture of their new environments and are afforded the opportunity to showcase their critical and analytical talents, most will not shy away especially from critiquing and questioning many of the assumptions that are taken to be established truths by many in the West.

Critical thinking in a second language requires proficiency in the L2 in addition to having accumulated enough information about the topic at hand. To gain proficiency in a second language usually takes a long time, and even once students have become competent enough in the L2, they still need “sustained study of a subject area” as a means to increase their knowledge base before they are able to use their critical and analytical thinking abilities to evaluate it (Pally 1997, p 294).

The argument that LL2 may be incapable of critical thinking due to the environments where they grew up is based on the distinction between the individual and the community and the role that each plays in producing individuals with critical thinking abilities. According to Atkinson, “a mainstream U.S. view of individualism seems to be inherent in notions of critical thinking” (Atkinson, 1997, p. 81). Hence, Western cultures are often viewed as individualist while eastern cultures are viewed as collective. Individuals from Western cultures are therefore viewed as independent and autonomous while those from the East are described as interdependent and communal. Atkinson uses this distinction to indirectly advance his argument that belonging to a community that values collectivism and interdependence may not be conducive to developing one’s critical thinking skills.

Still, to equate individualism with critical thinking may be a bit short-sighted, if not indicative of the prejudiced attitudes and impulsive interpretations that continue to persist among many Western thinkers and educators who continue to assume a posture of cultural superiority.
although they may be total outsiders to these non-Western cultures that they claim to know and understand (Said, 1978; Appleby 2011). In today’s world especially, the concept of individual versus community identities has become so fluid as a result of globalization and the ease of access to and transmission of new information that it is simply impossible to generalize by making blanket statements about any one social group or culture. Canagarajah (2004) comments on this fluidity by emphasizing the fact that in this day and age, we “have traveled far from the traditional assumption in language studies that identities are static, unitary, and given” (p. 117).

Advocates of the need to teach critical thinking, especially to LL2, will often juxtapose it to rote learning, a phenomenon often attributed to students from non-Western cultures. Dominant discourses seem to confer these static identities on the LL2 (a rote learner cannot possibly be a critical thinker), which further extend to “notions of deficiency, inferiority, and disadvantage” (Canagarajah 2004, p. 117), while any attempt at understanding why certain cultures promote rote learning is often glossed over. Here it is important to note that in many non-Western cultures, the oral tradition holds a special place as the only means to transmit knowledge and cultural values from generation to generation. Atkinson claims that “in both Japanese and Chinese schools, memorization and choral recitation are promoted as major learning strategies in the classroom, and writing instruction focuses centrally on the memorization of formulaic phrases” (p. 83) as if students from Japan and China were representative of students from every corner of the world. In my view, having (the ability) to memorize as a means to certain ends should not necessarily exclude one from being a critical thinker; otherwise, American students studying to be medical doctors would be in real trouble!

Morgan (2007) doubts that critical thinking is “a unique product of prior family and community experiences” (p. 87), nor can it be taught and developed as a skill, nor is it “cultural thinking… discoverable if not clearly self-evident only to those brought up in a cultural milieu in which it operates, however tacitly, as a socially valued norm” (Atkinson, 1997, p. 89). Likewise, it is hard to generalize that critical thinking is not a “socially valued norm” in non-Western cultures. The fact that the authorities in certain parts of the world may not be keen on encouraging their subjects to question and critique does not necessarily mean that these cultures produce individuals who are deficient in critical thinking. How many people from the West have tried (or have been allowed to even try) to question and examine all sides of the 9/11 events? It seems that all the answers to these events were initially modeled to society, and questioning these answers for a long time was not tolerated and is still taboo in many circles. Again, this lack of criticism could be the outcome of censorship and lack of the flow of relevant knowledge and information, which in the end leads to lack of critical thinking, or rather the opportunity to utilize critical thinking.

Willingham (2007) draws a similar analogy: “a student who has learned to thoughtfully discuss the causes of the American Revolution from both the British and American perspectives doesn’t even think to question how the Germans viewed World War II” (p. 10). He goes on to explain that students might be able to use critical thinking in one situation and not in another because “[t]hought processes are intertwined with what is being thought about” (p. 10). To that explanation, one could also add that this could be the result of the students’ having learned about the American Revolution from both the American and the British perspectives but were never exposed to the German perspective when they studied WWII. Such decisions are usually top-down and are meant to be purposefully misleading.

It is true that culture and prior background knowledge can play an important role in one’s interpretations and worldview, but not to the extent where these cultural differences render one...
incapable of critical thinking simply by virtue of the fact that they were not born in the West. “Virtually everyone is capable of critical thinking and uses it all the time... The difficulty lies not in thinking critically, but in recognizing when to do so, and in knowing enough to do so successfully (Willingham, 2007, p. 18). Therefore, if one were to assume that everyone is capable of critical thinking, regardless of whether they were born in the West or the East, the next question would be: what does it take to actually be a good critical thinker and in what contexts?

Critical thinking requires background knowledge that can only be achieved through “sustained study of a subject” (Pally, 1997, p. 294). Without relevant knowledge about a certain subject, one would be incapable of using any of the skills required to be critical or analytical. According to Stapleton (2001), LL2 deficiency in critical thinking is a myth. Topic familiarity, more than culture, is what makes students able to activate critical thinking skills. Furthermore, being knowledgeable about a subject might be only the first step in the critical thinking process but is by no means the only one. One needs to be able to transfer those critical thinking skills to other contexts, which is not always possible, hence the inefficacy of teaching critical thinking (Willingham, 2007, p. 10).

4. To Teach or not to Teach Critical Thinking

Willington (2007) and Morgan (2001) both question whether it is even possible to teach critical thinking, but while Morgan warns language teacher education programs against putting too much focus on a type of critical thinking that might have no relevance to students’ lives, Willington argues that critical thinking cannot be taught, especially when it is presented out of context and when students do not possess the necessary command of the subject matter:

Can critical thinking be actually taught? Decades of cognitive research point to a disappointing answer: not really. People who have sought to teach critical thinking assumed that it is a skill, like riding a bicycle, and that, like other skills, once you learn it, you can apply it in any situation. Research from cognitive science shows that critical thinking is not that sort of skill. The processes of thinking are intertwined with the content of thought (that is, domain knowledge). Thus, if you remind a student to “look at an issue from multiple perspectives” often enough, he will learn that he ought to do so, but if he doesn’t know much about an issue, he can’t think about it from multiple perspectives. You can teach students maxims about how they ought to think, but without background knowledge and practice, they probably will not be able to implement the advice they memorize. (Willingham, 2007, p. 10)

Willingham argues that students in general need to have developed in-depth knowledge of an issue before they are able to evaluate, question, and examine it from different angles. In other words, without “domain knowledge,” students would be unable to implement their critical skills effectively, whether they are native speakers (NS) or non-native speakers (NNS) of English. Members of the latter group, on the other hand, are not only required to develop this knowledge to be effective critical thinkers; they are also required to be proficient enough in their L2 before they are able showcase the expected critical thinking skills. Nonetheless, for these LL2, linguistic proficiency is a prerequisite for in-depth and critical analysis in the learning process. Without the proper linguistic tools, they are unable to communicate, let alone question and evaluate an issue.

Another problem with teaching critical skills is that students immersed in content in one subject might be able to use critical thinking skills effectively when dealing with that particular
subject as they have developed experience and background knowledge only relevant to this one subject, but these skills would not be transferrable to other subjects or contexts. In other words, the more exposure and practice students receive in one academic area, the better they are equipped to use their critical thinking skills effectively in that area alone without necessarily being able to transfer those skills to other areas (Willingham, 2007).

Therefore, while I agree with Atkinson that educators have no business teaching critical thinking skills to LL2, I disagree with the basis for such a claim. The goal should be placed on language instruction first and foremost. LL2 needs assessment of every language learning group shows that students’ main goal from learning a new language is to be able to communicate, not to think critically (Richards, 2001). In other words, LL2’s main objective is to learn how to function and survive linguistically and culturally in their new environment. This should be their “sustained study of a subject area” (Pally, 1997, p. 294) first and foremost. As such, the tendency to equate lack of language proficiency with lack of cognitive sophistication or knowledge seems to be a misguided proposition and a revealing lack of familiarity with the priorities of the LL2.

Contrary to Atkinson’s position about the futility of trying to teach critical thinking to LL2, Benesch (1999) takes the middle ground by advocating

A dialogic approach to critical thinking [which] does not choose between immediate needs and the development of social awareness, believing that they can be taught simultaneously. A critical EAP teacher responds to the demands of content courses while encouraging students to question academic life and society. (p. 579)

But even if we were to adopt Benesch’s proposition, it would still be an ineffective endeavor to try to teach critical thinking skills to students who are still learning the basics of their new L2. Once students are at an advanced level, such a proposition could make more sense, but only if taken from the LL2’ perspective – that is by assuming that these students are critical thinkers in their L1 and might benefit from learning about some cultural peculiarities of their L2 culture that might eventually help them succeed academically in their new environment.

Benesch (1999) rightly suggests that “teaching critical thinking is neither an unguided free-for-all nor a didactic lecture but a balance between student contribution and gentle challenges by the teacher” (p. 578). Such an approach recognizes that teachers ought to challenge any previously unexamined assumptions that LL2 are not able to display or contribute to the critical thinking process and acknowledge that these learners, regardless of their cultural background, do indeed bring a great many L1 critical thinking skills to the learning process (Willingham, 2007).

What is disturbingly unfair in this debate is the apparently deterministic stance towards learners who come from non-Western cultures, which is often espoused by novice EAP teachers and many teaching assistants in charge of teaching first year writing classes (knowingly or unknowingly) who are usually the ones to become preoccupied with the necessity of teaching critical thinking. Because of their lack of familiarity with LL2 issues, these novice teachers tend to confuse lack of linguistic proficiency with lack of critical thinking abilities and as a result assume that non-native English speaking learners lack the critical and analytical abilities to be successful university learners and should therefore be explicitly taught this cognitive skill (Price, 1999). The assumption here might be that native speaking students are all proficient in these vital critical thinking skills simply by virtue of being able to communicate their thoughts with ease.
While NSS might be able to communicate their thoughts using a decent style and sentence structure, it is often not the case for the majority of NNS, whose first and foremost concern remains their struggle with form and mechanics. The major challenge to LL2 writers on college campuses is that their papers and reports are often satiated with grammar and sentence structure problems that can be very confusing to their college professors, especially those unfamiliar with LL2 issues. LL2’s ability to respond to a question thoughtfully and analytically is hardly ever the issue for educators in science and technology: it is usually “grammar.”

Furthermore, first year writing student samples have consistently shown that the major difference between L1 and L2 students in first year writing classes is linguistic performance, not in terms of their critical thinking abilities. Freshman writers in general find it very difficult to scratch the surface and provide in-depth analyses or make original contributions to ongoing conversations about any topic at hand (Silva and Matsuda 2001, Feldman 2008), which, in the eyes of first year writing instructors, justifies the need to teach critical thinking.

Still, critics of LL2’s critical thinking abilities are often unaware of the language factor when dealing with this group of learners. The fact that LL2 have to struggle on two fronts in every class they take at the university level is often glossed over. What needs to be kept in mind is that LL2, regardless of whether they are still taking EAP classes or graduate classes, are, and will for a very long time remain, first and foremost learners of English who struggle to “make sense” both as language learners and as regular degree-seeking students.

In an environment where LL2 have to compete against native speakers of English, LL2 are forced to prioritize in the course of writing an essay, for instance, thus having to pay more attention to their grammar and word choice, which results in little attention to so-called critical thinking and in-depth analysis their writing instructors tend to value and appreciate more than anything else. LL2’s struggle with vocabulary is also immense: being able to choose the right word to describe the right thought or emotion is challenging enough for native speakers, much less for LL2. As a result, it is only natural that critical thinking takes a back seat in the midst of all these concerns (Benesch, 1999).

5. Critical Thinking and The Banking Concept of Education

Cognitive scientists have long established the connection between language learning and cognitive development, but little research has been done on the development and teaching of critical thinking to English-language learners with few exceptions (Davidson, 1996; Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995). Whether critical thinking could or even ought to be taught, and whether teaching this skill ought to be a priority in EAP, Bridge and first year writing programs points to one problem: critical thinking seems to be lacking in these classes, and that is why instructors feel the need to teach it to all their students, regardless of whether they are native speakers of English or not. This is problematic in EAP contexts because most university classes are still using the banking theory to teaching (Freire, 1970). Could it be that the so-called lack of critical thinking is simply the result of students’ not being provided with the opportunity to show that they are capable of being critical thinkers? Could the teaching methodologies to which college students, and in particular those in freshman first year writing classes, are subjected, be the culprit when these methodologies do little to promote independent thinking and learning?

Most college classes, including first year writing classes, and to a lesser degree EAP classes, still consist of teacher-fronted classrooms where lecturing continues to be the preferred mode of delivering content. This approach to teaching conceives of the student as a passive recipient of the teacher’s knowledge, a concept the Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire, calls the
Banking Concept of Education (1970). According to this approach, instead of its being a process of inquiry, knowledge becomes a gift to be bestowed on the learners by those who view themselves as proprietors of this knowledge (the overzealous novice teachers), hence negating any knowledge those learners might bring to the learning process. In other words, the teachers’ existence becomes justified by the ignorance they project onto the learners, and because of the passive role assigned to them, these learners are deprived of the chance to develop any critical thinking abilities (p. 67).

Teaching and learning consist of acts of cognition that take place through dialogue (Benesch, 1999). Both learners and teachers become critical co-investigators in dialogue with each other, a process Freire refers to as problem-posing education. In this process, "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. Men teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher" (67). But the question is how many novice EAP and first year writing teachers are able to use these teaching techniques in their classrooms today? The answer is: very few indeed since most first year writing classes are taught by teaching and / or graduate assistants, who generally lack necessary formal and rigorous teacher training, and part time instructors, “often with limited experience in teaching writing to this population” (Williams, 1995). In the case of EAP, the situation usually gets better since the novice teachers eventually gains more experience in their field, contrary to the first year writing instructors, who oftentimes teach first year writing on a temporary basis, until they finish their graduate degree.

Furthermore, since many American instructors, whether they are full professors or Teaching Assistants, are frequently mostly familiar with American / Western college practices, they tend to portray these practices as being universally known norms that should be applied in every college classroom, whether it is in Dallas or Dubai. Such a view extends to language; as a result, linguistic competence (using English appropriately) becomes associated with cognitive competence, and because of such expectations, many LL2 might be viewed as deficient in critical thinking simply because these skills are disguised behind their linguistic skills. In the same vein, non-Western practices brought to American classrooms by foreign students may be seen as debilitating and are therefore frowned upon and rejected as worthless and void of any academic or cultural value (Vandermensbrugghe 2004).

LL2 seem to be caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they are viewed as incapable of critical thinking because of their lack of proficiency in their L2 and because of their lack of cultural insight into their new environment. On the other hand, critical linguists (Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tollefson, 2004) view attempts at learning about the new culture with suspicion by arguing against the hegemonic and assimilationist nature of English and deploring the complicity of language educators who contribute to English and by default American and Western supremacy. Language learning is by no means a neutral activity. Like other languages, English is a culturally loaded medium of communication, and learning it entails learning (or at least learning about) many of the cultural and educational practices associated with the environments where it is spoken (Hinkel, 1999). However, Morgan (2004) argues against presenting such concepts to students who might not be interested in the political ramifications of language learning. To succeed in learning a language, one is required to understand and even appreciate the cultural influences attached to such endeavor, regardless of the language they are learning, especially when such cultural or political influences have a relevance to the daily struggles of these learners. But if these cultural
peculiarities are presented out of context, they might harm the learning process of the LL2 rather than develop their critical thinking abilities.

It is true that English is often associated with the overbearing power of the United States and at times Britain. However, those who argue against the hegemonic and assimilationist nature of EAP perhaps do not realize that students engaged in learning EAP may in fact want to be assimilated or at least are not interested in this debate at all. Some of these students may even be disillusioned with their own values and the system and culture where they grew up and as a result may want to be immersed in their newly acquired culture.

Furthermore, the type of critical thinking that encourages learners to question the hegemonic nature of English does not necessarily transfer to their classroom critical thinking skills. Instead, this kind of critical thinking imposes on them a certain perspective and worldview that they may or may not agree without taking into account the cultural differences and language diversity of today’s language learner. The truth is that it would be hard for anyone nowadays to argue against the pragmatic value associated with learning English as an international language, as it is viewed by many as key to upward mobility and socio-economic success. English may be seen as a culturally destructive force by critical linguists, but its economic benefits should not be discounted (at least from the perspective of its learners) simply because it represents certain hegemonic and / or imperialistic ideologies that LL2 may not identify with anyway.

Learning English might lead to cultural erosion and assimilation, but the same can be said about any other language, although these arguments seem to be more pronounced when it comes to English because of its association with the hegemonic forces of the US and Britain. One could also argue that learning English in an English-speaking environment could not simply be viewed as a destructive force; on the contrary, it may even have benefits that are non-linguistic, such as helping the LL2 gain a different perspective by constructing a new identity, all of which could be instrumental in enhancing one’s critical thinking skills. Regardless, it is time critical linguists started looking at this debate from the LL2s’ perspective, who may not necessarily see anything political about their motivation to learn English!

6. Conclusion

Critical thinking continues to be a buzz word in EAP, Bridge and freshman first year writing programs, although what it exactly means to possess this cognitive skill remains unclear. Nonetheless, the need to teach this skill continues to be a priority for many educators, some of whom have concluded that it can be taught as a separate skill (Davidson & Duham, 1996). Others (Atkinson, 1997; Willingahm 2007) have argued against any attempt at teaching critical thinking for different reasons: Atkinson has argued that teaching critical thinking may be ineffective because it is a Western middle class tradition tacitly acquired through socialization, thus implying that LL2 may not be able to display this set of skills because such skills are not necessarily valued or nurtured in the environments where they grew up. Willingham, on the other hand, argues that critical thinking cannot be taught because it is not “like riding a bicycle” (10) and cannot be applied to every situation that calls for critical thinking – in other words, it is not transferrable, and there is no “program that effectively teaches students to think critically in a variety of situations” (12).

Some educators have tried to immerse students in critical thinking instead of immersing them in academic content. The problem is that learners are unable to think critically about an issue that they know little about. Therefore, sustained content instruction is crucial to developing critical thinking skills, which become incidental in the process (Pally, 1997). Such requirements
seem to apply to all learners, regardless of whether they were born in middle-class Western environments or not, and whether they are native speakers of English or second language learners.

Nevertheless, the language factor ought to be taken into account when judging LL2 performance. LL2 may not display critical thinking skills because they have far more pressing priorities, namely the need to communicate their thoughts as clearly and as eloquently as possible and be understood by their instructors in particular. Therefore, the claim that critical thinking is a social practice that only students from the West may be capable of is a difficult proposition to maintain on the practical level, especially when one compares NS and NNS’s writing samples (Janopoulos, 1992; Santos, 1988). The difference lies in linguistic expression, not in the ability to show evidence critical thinking and in-depth analysis.

Teaching critical thinking as a subject to EAP students who are still in the early developmental stages of learning English may be a useless endeavor; the focus, instead, should be placed on helping them develop their language skills with “gentle challenges by the teacher” (Benesch, 1999, p. 578) until they achieve a level where they are able to communicate effectively. Critical thinking skills will come at a later proficiency stage since this skill is a transferrable ability that many LL2 are capable of in their first language and eventually bring to the English-medium classroom. Yet, this skill cannot materialize until the students are proficient enough in the target language. Therefore, in my view, instead of attempting to teach critical thinking directly to the LL2, what is needed is to provide these learners with appropriate learning opportunities to develop their linguistic aptitude first; their creativity and critical and analytical skills will follow. LL2 are capable of critical thinking skills, but these skills are often disguised by a lack of proficiency in the English language, and the only way these skills can begin to surface is after the learner has developed the linguistic confidence to communicate effectively in the second or foreign language.

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References


Developing an Instrument that Tests for English-Language Personality

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Abstract

Studying a second-language involves several cultural and environmental pressures that can shift behaviour and alter personality. A person may act one way in their native surroundings, but act completely differently when travelling, studying a foreign language, or talking with people from a different culture. Existing personality instruments do no capture this shift in personality, and thus a specialized personality instrument is required. This study surveyed 287 Japanese university students with 263 specialized second-language personality items. Items focused on situations involving travel, being in English class, meeting native English-speakers, watching English movies, and other activities that involve the study of English. A factor analysis, a correlational analysis and a Rasch principal components analysis was conducted on this new instrument, as well as an established personality instrument to determine their effectiveness at capturing the participants’ personality. The ultimate result was a 50 item personality instrument intended for second-language contexts, which performed better than the established personality instrument. The correlation analysis also revealed that the underlying constructs of personality were not highly correlated across instruments, indicating the presence of a native language personality and a second-language personality for participants.

Keywords Personality, TESOL, Rasch, correlations
Introduction

There have been several attempts to research personality within a TESOL-context, however, in all instances the instrument used to measure personality was intended for an overarching conception of personality, situated within a person’s native-language and culture, indifferent to many situational considerations. One only needs to talk to a fluent bilingual to hear how, at least in some instances; people develop different personalities based on the situation. In Japan, it is not uncommon to hear how a person can feel rigid and reserved when ensconced in the cultural, social, and language trappings of Japan, yet this same person may feel free and unhindered when speaking English in a culture less tied to rules of social conduct. However, as of yet, a personality instrument has not been developed to handle these situational complications. If such an instrument could be developed, one that could capture personality shifts that arise from contextual pressures, it may have a profound effect on TESOL research involving personality, yielding new theories and relationships between personality dimensions and second language acquisition that have not yet revealed them.

Literature Review

Through lexical studies of the five-factor adjective descriptors of the Big Five model of personality (i.e. personality is comprised of the five dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness), it has been suggested that personality factors may be affected by the surrounding culture. By analyzing the English lexicon, some researchers have claimed that each of the five personality dimensions in the Big Five lexically evolved at a different rate, a finding that suggests that within society as a whole, personality develops and changes in response to social developments (Piedmont & Aycock 2006). Specifically in Western society, openness, the dimension which covers how open a person may be to new concepts and ideas, appears to be the most lexically recent of the five factors, possibly being catalyzed by major social events such as the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, when new ways of thinking and conducting business were regarded more highly than at other times in Western history. An ANOVA based on the mean lexical origins of descriptors (by year) for each of the five personality dimensions revealed that extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were the first four personality dimensions to be represented in the English lexicon, with openness’s lexical origins coming significantly later. The implication is that personality dimensions, in this case openness, are not stable across different historical periods, and by extension, are not stable across different environments and cultures. To confirm this, researchers examined a non-industrial, agrarian sub-Saharan African community to determine if all five personality dimensions were as strongly represented as in present-day Western society. They discovered that openness was more difficult to isolate, probably because the lack of vocabulary representing openness in the culture resulted in a lack of self-identification with that construct for the participants in the study (Heuchert, Parker, Stumpf, & Myburgh 2000; Horn 2000). Further, while some cultures might display fewer than five personality factors, other cultures might display more. In other non-English lexical studies (Ashton, Lee, & Goldberg 2006), a humility/humble factor was discovered in some Asian cultures, resulting in a six-factor personality model termed HEXACO (Lee & Ashton 2004; Lee & Ashton 2006). A subsequent modification of the open-source personality instrument IPIP Big Five Factor Markers (to hereby be referred to as the IPIP BFFM), resulting in the IPIP-HEXACO, reflects the possible future sphere of influence that the HEXACO model might someday wield (Ashton, Lee, & Goldberg 2006; Goldberg 2007).
Suffice it to say, whether four, five, six, or more factors, environment and culture need to be considered in any study discussing personality. Language classrooms, particularly those taught by native speakers, have affiliations with the target language’s culture, different to the one in which the classroom is situated, whether through direct influence from the native teacher’s conduct or through cultural perceptions tied to the target language that seep into the classroom. As a result, inclusion in a second language classroom must be considered, to some degree, as being in another culture. Unfortunately the wording of items used in the prevalent personality instruments does not recognize respondents situated in another culture, where personality might shift because of environmental and cultural pressures. When an item asks whether a respondent is shy, respondents might confidently respond “no,” yet that same respondent might respond differently when asked if they are shy when speaking a second language, when travelling abroad, or in the presence of a native speaker of the target language. Certainly some of this might be tied to other variables such as heightened anxiety or lack of motivation, but it seems reasonable to assume that some people just change in the presence of another culture (although maybe not consciously). It is important to modify questionnaire items to effectively capture shifts in personality brought on by these environmental and cultural pressures.

One emerging personality model that has challenged the notion of personality as a static trait is the Personality and Role Identity Structural Modal, or PRISM (Wood & Roberts 2006). PRISM is a three-tiered hierarchical structure with general personality traits, such as extraversion and neuroticism situated at the top. General traits are an average of the second tier, role identities. For example, most people occupy a variety of roles in their life, such as work, with friends, with family, in clubs, and romantically. Each of these usually involves a unique identity that is tied to that specific context. If a person is relatively talkative with family, with friends, and in romantic situations, but not talkative at work, those four role identities taken together establish their general trait as relatively extraverted (three extraverted roles and one introverted role would average to be extraverted). The bottom tier of this bottom-up personality model is referred to as role experiences. It is the most dynamic of these tiers, and represents the positive or negative associations a person may be having in their role at any given time, such as satisfaction from completing a project at work or angst from an acrimonious romantic relationship. Just as the first tier of general traits is an amalgam of the second tier, each role identity from the second tier is an amalgam of third-tier experiences. In sum, the third-tier can gradually change the second-tier, which can in turn alter the first-tier, challenging the notion that personality is fixed and offering support to a trait-state compromise of personality theory. Existing trait-based personality instruments such as the NEO-PiR, IPIP Big Five Factor Markers, and even the MBTI attempt to capture personality on this first tier, yet because of the aforementioned peculiarities with language learning, it is likely that language learning anomalies are occurring on the second and third tiers, and are not strong enough to overcome conflicting second- and third-tier identities and experiences that occur in native language situations.

Evidence of this need to specialize items to reflect cultural pressures can be found in immigration studies designed to investigate how personality and identity become destabilized in foreign culture contexts. In a study examining Chinese immigrants to Canada and how they behaved relative to ethnic-Chinese born in Canada, (McCrae, Yik, Trapnell, Bond, & Paulhus 1998) found that despite similar genetic compositions because of their shared ethnicity, the two populations displayed different personality characteristics. The Canadian-born group scored significantly higher on extraversion, openness, and agreeableness dimensions, likely because of behavioral demands created by Canadian society. Over time, the immigrant community
acculturated to their surroundings and began to display some of the same characteristics as the Canadian-born group. Perhaps language students function in the same way, not displaying certain personality characteristics in their native culture, resulting in the lack of an identifiable relationship in many TESOL research studies between personality (as measured by existing instruments) and second language acquisition. However, when in a language classroom, or better yet, a new country, their personality might shift, like the Chinese immigrants, or entire personality dimensions might be gained or lost, like the missing openness of the aforementioned non-industrial African Bushmen or the added humility dimension in some Asian cultures.

Lastly, there have been some recent efforts by educational psychologists to create a taxonomy of which situations can alter personality (Saucier, Bel-Bahar, & Fernandez 2007), yet this effort is only at the preliminary stages. It is important that changes in personality spurred by environmental and cultural pressures be addressed by existing instruments, something that could greatly enhance future research.

In a study that demonstrated the relative malleability of the personality construct, and the need to adapt it to different contexts, (Bowler, Bowler, & Phillips 2009) demonstrate that the five-factor personality model fluctuates in response to the individual. This study, involving 718 undergraduate university students, split participants into three groups, a low cognitive complexity group, an average cognitive complexity group, and a high cognitive complexity group. Cognitive complexity was measured by the Computer-Administered Rep Test (Woehr, Miller, & Lane 1998). Results indicated that a 3-factor personality model was best-suited for the low cognitive complexity group, a 5-factor personality model was best-suited for the average cognitive complexity group (as well as the entire sample as a whole), and a 7-factor personality model was best-suited for the high cognitive complexity group. The personality instrument administered to students was the Unipolar 100 Big Five Markers (Goldberg 1992), which is intriguing because one wonders which two additional factors might be embedded within this 5-factor instrument, in the case of the high cognitive complexity group. One also wonders which two factors were dropped (or merged) in the low cognitive complexity group (the authors do not specify). While the Bowler, Bowler, & Phillips study (2009) questions the consistency of the Five Factor Model (FFM) across different groups, this paper does not question the general validity of the FFM. The convergent validity of the FFM has been repeatedly endorsed (McCrae & Costa 1999; Garcia, Aluja, & Garcia 2006), and even the Bowler, Bowler and Phillips study (2009) confirmed the FFM as appropriate when viewing their sample as a whole. However, the study does underscore the need for scrutiny of personality instruments in varying contexts, rather than acceptance across all contexts. Just as personality factors may disappear or appear in the face of varying degrees of cognitive complexity, personality instrument items may need to be dropped or added in the face of cultural and environmental pressures.

Method

The construction and validation of the Questionnaire of English Environment Personality (QuEEP) involved several steps. First, a factor analysis was conducted with the initial 263 items across five personality dimensions. The number of items was reduced to the 50 items that loaded most strongly on their respective personality dimensions, 10 for each of the big five personality dimensions. Items that loaded on two or more dimensions simultaneously, or loaded on an unexpected dimension were not included amongst the final 50 items. A factor analysis was also conducted on the 50-item International Personality Item Pool Big Five Factor Markers (IPIP BFFM) to provide context to the QuEEP results. The IPIP BFFM was developed to provide an
alternative to existing personality instruments, which had more items and were under copyright protection. The *IPIP BFFM* is intended to provide personality researchers with an open-source instrument that is shorter, easier to procure, and more accurate than competing instruments like the NEO-Pi-R (Goldberg 1999).

Second, a correlational analysis was conducted to determine how closely the constructs in each instrument were situated. Specifically, if like-factors had a high correlation with each other (for example, if the *QuEEP* extraversion factor was highly correlated with the *IPIP BFFM* extraversion factor), it would suggest that personality is in fact stable across different contexts. However, a relatively low correlation between like-factors would suggest a situational dissonance between the native-language extraversion of the *IPIP BFFM* and the second-language extraversion of the *QuEEP*, thereby justifying the construction of the *QuEEP* as a second-language situation-specific personality instrument.

Finally, a Rasch analysis was conducted using the data obtained for the 50-item version of the *QuEEP* in order to confirm the suitability of the 50 items. A particular focus was placed upon item fit, explained variance, unexplained variance, and the Rasch reliability and separation indices to determine item quality. Alongside this Rasch analysis of the *QuEEP*, a parallel Rasch analysis was conducted on the 50-item *IPIP BFFM* to compare the two instruments and ascertain the effectiveness of the *QuEEP* in relation to a more established personality instrument.

**Participants**

The Questionnaire of English Environment Personality was completed by 287 Japanese university students: 188 first-year students, 92 second-year students, 6 third-year students, and 1 fourth-year student. The participants completed the questionnaire in May of 2012, with almost all students in 13 classes at five universities completing the survey. The students were taking a variety of courses and came from several different faculties (see Table 1), but were all taught by the same native English teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>South of Tokyo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Central Tokyo</td>
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<td>83</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Engineering, Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>West-Central Tokyo</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Global Japanese Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>North-West Tokyo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The settings for the online survey collection website, www.surveymonkey.com, were set so that students had to make a selection (questions could not be skipped) for one of the six answer choices for each question on the *QuEEP* (*Strongly disagree, Disagree, Slightly disagree, Slightly agree, Agree*, and *Strongly agree*). As a result, no data were missing for any of the 263 items across 287 students (75,481 completed items in total). However, for the *IPIP BFFM*’s 50 items, students were asked to enter a value from one to five (ascending from one, answer choices were *Very inaccurate, Moderately inaccurate, Neither inaccurate nor accurate, Moderately accurate*, and *Very accurate*) into a box. Ultimately there were four instances of a student not entering a number, as well as two instances of a student entering an incorrect number (40 and 1555). In the case of the missing values, an asterisk was entered in the place of the missing numerical values so that the Winsteps program could conduct the Rasch analysis without disruption. In the case of the incorrect values, the first digit of the value (“4” and “1”) was taken as the intended response.
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while the remaining digits were deleted (“0” and “555”). There were no instances in which a participant provided implausible data, such as repeatedly entering in the same value for all responses. As a result, no participants were deleted from the sample.

Results – Factor Analysis

The first phase of this study involved conducting a factor analysis with 262 of the items. After selecting several different extraction and rotation methods, it appeared that the data most closely followed the expected five-construct pattern with maximum likelihood extraction and equamax rotation. Only 262 items were included in the factor analysis, instead of 263, because the data for item E35 (the 35th item within the extraversion set of items) was not collected properly by www.surveymonkey.com. It is not known why the data could not be collected properly, or how to remedy the situation so the data could be saved, so the item was eliminated from the first factor analysis.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure indicated poor sampling for the analysis, KMO = .33 (Hutcheson & Sofronion 1999), with a guideline of 0.5-0.7 as mediocre, 0.7-0.8 as good, 0.8-0.9 as very good, and greater than 0.9 as excellent. Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at 67324.35, \( p = .00 \). There were 67 factors with eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1 (Kaiser 1974), however the first five factors had eigenvalues of 48.72, 17.32, 8.00, 6.71, and 5.27, accounting for 32.95% of the variance. The rotated sums of squared loadings indicated five factors with eigenvalues of 20.80, 18.56, 16.50, 13.89, and 12.93 accounting for 31.68% of variance. The scree plot did not indicate a clear inflection point to justify five factors, as many items and factors obscured visual interpretation. The items that clustered on the same factors suggested that factor 1 represented neuroticism, factor 2 openness, factor 3 conscientiousness, factor 4 extraversion, and factor 5 agreeableness.

A standard of +/- .40 was used to screen items. Items that had a factor loading below +/- .40 were deleted from the initial set of 262 items on the questionnaire. However, because so many non-performing items were to be deleted, it was expected that the remaining items would show a significant increase in their factor loadings. As a result, the +/- .40 loading criteria was only applied to items from the neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness personality factors because there was an abundance of items that met the criteria. With the extraversion and agreeableness factors, far fewer items exceeded the +/- .40 criterion, so the cut-off threshold was lowered to +/- .35. Also, items in the neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness factors that loaded onto multiple factors or onto an unintended factor were deleted from the questionnaire, while items in the extraversion or agreeableness factors were granted an exception to these selection criteria.

The first screening of items resulted in 14 remaining neuroticism items (25 items deleted), 23 remaining conscientiousness items (24 items deleted), 17 remaining openness items (37 items deleted), 17 remaining extraversion items (41 items deleted), and 19 remaining agreeableness items (45 items deleted).

A factor analysis (FA) with maximum likelihood extraction and orthogonal rotation (equamax) was conducted on the remaining 90 items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis, KMO = .89, which should be considered very good (Kaiser 1974). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at 14766.72, \( p = .00 \). There were 20 factors with eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, however the first five factors had eigenvalues of 20.02, 8.56, 4.41, 3.26, and 2.93, accounting for 43.05% of the variance. The rotated sums of squared loadings indicated five factors with eigenvalues of 8.46, 8.28, 7.33, 6.45, and 5.64 accounting for 39.73% of variance. The scree plot indicated an inflection point after the
fifth factor, supporting the Big Five factor model of personality. The items that clustered on the same factors suggested the following: Factor 1 represented conscientiousness, Factor 2 openness, Factor 3 neuroticism, Factor 4 extraversion, and Factor 5 agreeableness.

For the final screening of items, 40 items were removed to create a 50-item instrument. Only 10 items per factor were selected, and preference was given to items with the strongest factor loading on the intended factor. However, some consideration was also given to factor loading on unintended factors, in that if there were two items with a similar factor loading on the intended factor, priority was given to the item with the weaker factor loading on the secondary factor. For example, on the conscientiousness factor, item C43 had a stronger factor loading than item C36 (.54 vs. .53), yet it was not selected for the final version of the instrument because it had a much stronger loading on a secondary factor (.31 on the openness factor) than item C36 did (.17 on the extraversion factor). A factor analysis (FA) with maximum likelihood extraction and orthogonal rotation (equamax) was conducted on the remaining 50 items (see Table 2).

### Table 2. Final Factor Analysis of the 50 QuEEP Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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</tr>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>O30</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>O36</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.57</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>O37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>O42</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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<td>.28</td>
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The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis, KMO = .90, which can be considered excellent (Kaiser 1974). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at 6863.55, $p = .00$. There were nine factors with eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, however the first five factors had eigenvalues of 12.06, 5.66, 2.96, 2.30, and 2.93, accounting for 49.97% of the variance. The rotated sums of squared loadings indicated five factors with eigenvalues of 4.90, 4.76, 4.49, 4.14, and 3.96 accounting for 44.50% of variance. The scree plot indicated a clear inflection point after the fifth factor, further justifying the Big Five factor model of personality. The items that clustered on the same factors suggested the following: Factor 1 represented neuroticism, Factor 2 openness, Factor 3 conscientiousness, Factor 4 agreeableness, and Factor 5 extraversion.

It was thought that conducting a FA on a native-language based personality instrument, such as the International Personality Item Pool Big Five Factor Markers test, would provide valuable context to the results obtained for the QuEEP. Results of the factor analysis on the IPIP BFFM can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Factor Analysis of the 50 IPIP BFFM Items

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<tr>
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A factor analysis using maximum likelihood extraction and orthogonal rotation (equamax) was conducted on the 50-item *IPIP BFFM*. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy of the analysis, KMO = .79, which can be considered good (Kaiser 1974). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at 5498.18, *p* = .00. There were 13 factors with eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, however the first five factors had initial eigenvalues of 7.57, 4.38, 3.74, 2.75, and 1.93, accounting for 40.74% of the variance. The rotated sums of squared loadings indicated five factors with eigenvalues of 4.07, 3.49, 3.29, 3.22, and 3.10 accounting for 34.32% of variance. The scree plot indicated a clear inflection point after the fourth factor, which was perhaps indicative of the inadequate factor loading of +/- .30 (or less) for 6 of the 10 openness items. The items that clustered on the same factors suggested that factor 1 represented extraversion, factor 2 conscientiousness, factor 3 openness, factor 4 neuroticism, and factor 5 agreeableness. Only 33 out of 50 items had a loading of +/- .40 on their intended factor (9 for extraversion, 6 for conscientiousness, 4 for openness, 9 for neuroticism, and 5 for agreeableness). Interestingly, the extraversion and neuroticism factors seemed to be the most fully realized and they are also the two factors in the Big Five personality model with the longest history of theory, both appearing in Eysenck’s Big Two model of personality (predating the Big Five and the Big Three models).

Results – Correlational Analysis

To get a clear picture of how strong the correlations were within each instrument, Rasch person ability measures for each of the five personality factors were obtained for the 287 participants involved in the study and a correlational analysis was performed. The correlations for the person measures for the five personality factors for both the *QuEEP* and the *IPIP BFFM* are displayed in Table 4. As seen in the results of the Rasch analysis that follows, the personality factors that had the highest correlations with each other were the ones that appeared to cohere when item dimensionality was tested, most notably the extraversion and neuroticism factors for the *QuEEP* at .61 and the extraversion and openness factors for the *IPIP BFFM* at .39. However, this was not always the case, as the conscientiousness and neuroticism factors on the *IPIP BFFM* did cohere, yet did not display a significant correlation. Interestingly, the correlations between the personality factors of each instrument were relatively low, with the correlation between the *QuEEP* agreeableness factor and the *IPIP BFFM* agreeableness factor at .33. The other correlations between the two instruments were .27 for the conscientiousness factor, .32 for the extraversion factor, .23 for the neuroticism factor, and an insignificant correlation for the openness factor. This would seem to suggest that there is a dissonance between native language personality, as measured by the *IPIP BFFM* and a second language personality as measured by the *QuEEP*. If the two instruments were tapping into the same constructs, then the correlation between like factors would presumably be much higher. Interestingly, in the case of conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, there are actually different personality factors...
with higher correlations across the two instruments than like correlations across the two instruments.

Table 4. Correlations among Factors for the QuEEP and IPIP BFFM

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Note. A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Extraversion; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness.
* p = 0.01 (two-tailed)

When comparing the strength of the correlations among factors within each instrument, the correlations among QuEEP factors are much higher than the correlations among the IPIP BFFM factors. The implication to this difference in correlational strength suggests that the IPIP BFFM factors are more independently realized than their QuEEP counterparts, likely because the premise of the IPIP BFFM (and other native language personality tests) are not limited to specific situations or experiences. When items can be drawn from any situation or experience, there is less likelihood of overlap that might yield similarities. For instance, with a second language personality instrument such as the QuEEP, the extraversion and openness scales both include items focused on travel. Despite being situated in different personality scales, these items might yield some synchronicities because of the common theme of travel, in this particular case, someone who is welcoming of travel is likely to be both extraverted and open in travel situations, resulting in a correlation. Despite the higher correlation among QuEEP factors, this should not diminish the veracity of the instrument as unidimensionality was evident, and is outlined below. Rather, the higher correlations among QuEEP factors should be recognized as a by-product of situational limits imposed on items in order to capture a specific environment, in this case a second language learning environment.

Results – Rasch Analysis

To confirm the dimensionality of the instrument, a Rasch analysis was conducted on the QuEEP. Testing unidimensionality can be accomplished by conducting a Rasch principal component analysis of item residuals. If the first residual contrast has an eigenvalue under 2.0, it can be assumed that the construct is fundamentally unidimensional. As mentioned above, it was
believed that the QuEEP would follow a Big Five model of personality, comprising the constructs of neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness, extraversion, and agreeableness.

The first step in confirming unidimensionality involved entering the data for all 50 QuEEP items into Winsteps, and then checking the item dimensionality. If items within a single construct clump together, it would indicate unidimensionality, which would need to be clarified with further analysis. If items from two constructs are cohering together, this may again be an indication of unidimensionality, provided the two constructs can be separated in a further analysis. Results indicated that it may be possible to parse out the constructs of extraversion and neuroticism into single constructs, as the negative loading items were either extraversion or neuroticism items, with the sole exception of C25. However, item C25 was earlier shifted to the extraversion scale, thereby keeping intact the extraversion and neuroticism cohering of items.

Taking only the items from the neuroticism and extraversion scales and re-entering them into Winsteps, the explained variance for the two sets of items was revealed to be 42.3%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 3.2, or 9.3% of the unexplained variance. The items clustered perfectly, with neuroticism items positively loading, and extraversion items negatively loading, indicating two distinct dimensions. Again, the N22 and C25 items had negative loadings, but had earlier been converted to the extraversion set of items, preserving the interpretation of two distinct dimensions existing within this data set.

Since these two sets of items cohered, a further analysis of their structure was conducted, in particular, an examination of their item fit, item separation, item reliability, person separation, person reliability, and Wright maps (to see how well the items were spread across the study’s participants). The explained variance for the neuroticism set of items was 52.6%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.7, or 8.1% of the unexplained variance. The explained variance for the extraversion set of items was 40.0%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.6, or 9.7% of the unexplained variance, as shown in Table 5.

The remaining three QuEEP factors that needed to be tested for unidimensionality included the conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness factors. When the items from all three factors were entered into Winsteps and tested for unidimensionality, the variance explained by the measures was 43.6%, while the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 4.0 and unexplained variance of 7.6%. The openness items separated themselves as the items with the most positive loadings, while the conscientiousness items all had negative loadings and the agreeableness items straddled the middle ground with either slightly positive or slightly negative loadings. It was clear that the openness items were unidimensional, and it appeared there was a good chance that the conscientiousness and agreeableness items would be as well since there was only one conscientiousness item, C39, that was even mixing with the agreeableness items at this early stage. Nevertheless, openness appeared to be unidimensional, and a further examination would be required with the openness items isolated. The explained variance for the openness set of items was 54.5%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.8, or 8.1% of the unexplained variance.

The remaining two QuEEP factors that needed to be tested for unidimensionality after removing the openness items were conscientiousness and agreeableness. When the items from both factors were entered into Winsteps and tested for unidimensionality, the variance explained by the measures was 45.7%, while the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 3.0 and unexplained variance of 8.2%. The agreeableness items all loaded positively, while the conscientiousness items all loaded negatively, suggesting two distinct dimensions. The only item from the previous
dimensionality analysis that did not cohere with items from its own scale, C39, now cohered with other items from the conscientiousness scale.

The explained variance for the agreeableness set of items was 53.3%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.9, or 8.9% of the unexplained variance. The explained variance for the conscientiousness set of items was 52.5%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.6, or 7.7% of the unexplained variance, as can be seen in Table 5.

While examining the dimensionality of the IPIP BFFM, it was expected that the Rasch analysis would similarly reveal an underlying five factor construct to the instrument. After processing all of the items through Winsteps, the explained variance was 24.7%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 5.0, or 7.5% of the unexplained variance. Results suggested that the factors of conscientiousness and neuroticism needed to be isolated to determine if they could be separated into defined factors, as the positive loading portion of the table was dominated by either conscientiousness or neuroticism items. There were several openness and agreeableness items interspersed among some of the weaker loading conscientiousness and neuroticism items, extending to the negative loading scale, however, for the most part, the conscientiousness and neuroticism items cohered. Recall that with the QuEEP, it was the extraversion and neuroticism items, not conscientiousness items, that cohered in the initial PCA, signalling an immediate divergence between these two instruments.

Taking only the items from the conscientiousness and neuroticism scales and re-entering them into Winsteps, the explained variance for the two sets of items was revealed to be 28.4%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 3.7, or 13.3% of the unexplained variance. The items clustered perfectly, with neuroticism items positively loading, and conscientiousness items negatively loading, except for one conscientiousness item, C4, which had the weakest positive loading (still clustering with the negatively loading conscientiousness items as it was weaker than all of the neuroticism items). This indicated two clear dimensions within the data set.

A further analysis of each set of items was conducted, in particular, an examination of item fit, item separation, item reliability, person separation, person reliability, and Wright maps to see how well the items were spread across the study’s participants. The explained variance for the conscientiousness set of items was 34.0%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.8, or 12.2% of the unexplained variance. The explained variance for the neuroticism set of items was 35.9%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 2.2, or 13.9% of the unexplained variance.

The remaining three constructs that needed to be tested for unidimensionality included extraversion, openness, and agreeableness. When the items from all three constructs were entered into Winsteps and tested for unidimensionality, the variance explained by the measures was 31.0%, while the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 3.6 and unexplained variance of 8.4%. The agreeableness items separated themselves as the items with the most positive loadings, while the extraversion and openness items all had negative loadings or very low positive loadings. It is clear that the agreeableness items were unidimensional, and it appeared that the extraversion and openness items could be, but would require further analysis. Nevertheless, agreeableness appeared to be unidimensional, and a further analysis would be required with the agreeableness items isolated. The explained variance for the agreeableness set of items was 35.8%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 2.3, or 14.8% of the unexplained variance.
Taking only the items from the *IPIP BFFM* openness and extraversion scales and re-entering them into Winsteps, the explained variance for the two sets of items was revealed to be 32.8%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 3.0, or 10.0% of the unexplained variance. The items clustered perfectly, with openness items positively loading, and extraversion items negatively loading, indicating two clear dimensions within the data set. The explained variance for the extraversion set of items was 41.3%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 1.8, or 10.4% of the unexplained variance. The explained variance for the openness set of items was 41.8%, while the unexplained variance after the first contrast had an eigenvalue of 2.6, or 15.0% of the unexplained variance.

In Table 5, the aforementioned statistics for the Rasch PCA for both the *QuEEP* and the *IPIP BFFM* have been arranged to allow for a quick comparison, and it would appear that the *QuEEP* performed better than the *IPIP BFFM* in this particular study, exhibiting superior variance, separation, reliability, and item fit in all but a few instances.

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<th>Variance unaccounted (eigenvalue)</th>
<th>Variance unaccounted (%)</th>
<th>Item sep.</th>
<th>Item rel.</th>
<th>Person sep.</th>
<th>Person rel.</th>
<th>Infit range</th>
<th>Outfit range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C QuEEP</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.88-1.10</td>
<td>.87-1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C IPIP BFFM</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.70-1.56</td>
<td>.70-1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N QuEEP</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.73-1.30</td>
<td>.72-1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N IPIP BFFM</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.78-1.15</td>
<td>.76-1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A QuEEP</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.63</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.72-1.29</td>
<td>.73-1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A IPIP BFFM</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.85-1.32</td>
<td>.83-1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E QuEEP</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.84-1.26</td>
<td>.85-1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E IPIP BFFM</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.77-1.38</td>
<td>.78-1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O QuEEP</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.85-1.34</td>
<td>.91-1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O IPIP BFFM</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.74-1.37</td>
<td>.73-1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note, Variance unaccounted for refers to the 1st contrast.
Discussion

With regard to the factor analysis results, it is difficult to conclusively say that the items on the QuEEP are better at capturing personality than those of the IPIP BFFM because of the superior factor loading of the QuEEP items. It is difficult because the QuEEP items in this study were cherry-picked because of their superior factor loading. However, if the results of this study can be replicated, then it would seem the QuEEP is indeed a superior instrument, at least in this particular context. Both instruments seem to do a fairly good job at capturing temperament-dimensions like extraversion and neuroticism, with all 20 of the QuEEP items and 18 of the IPIP BFFM items with a factor loading above +/- .40. Yet these two instruments diverge when measuring the agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness items, with all 30 of the QuEEP items and only 15 of the IPIP BFFM items achieving an acceptable factor loading. It is a bit surprising to see conscientiousness items in this group as it would seem conscientious behaviour would be fairly consistent across different contexts, cultures, and relatively easy to identify. Generally, items that signify hard-work do not get lost in translation and conscientiousness is easily quantifiable in the minds of respondents when they evaluate their own behaviour, and so the divide between these two instruments probably should be minimal, yet the IPIP BFFM had four items that did not reach an acceptable minimum factor loading.

However, in all fairness, of the four that did not achieve the minimum factor loading, three had a factor loading of +/- .39, which should probably be considered close enough. The real weakness in the IPIP BFFM is seen in the agreeableness and openness factor, where only 9 items (of 20) achieved acceptable factor loadings and four items even loaded on the wrong personality factor (which was the conscientiousness factor in all four cases). Only four openness items actually loaded on the openness factor, and this was probably just a result of redundancy in the items, not a connection to an underlying construct of openness. Items O5 and O10 are both about ideas (“am full of ideas” and “have excellent ideas”) while items O3 and O6 are both about imagination (“have a vivid imagination” and “do not have a good imagination”). With four of the ten items about the related concepts of ideas and imagination, their similarity probably formed the basis of the construct, not an actual insight into openness. Redundancy in items can skew a factor towards that redundancy, making non-redundant items ineffective, weakening the cohesiveness of the set of items. In this respect, the QuEEP succeeds in there is less redundancy in the wording of items, and underlying constructs are based on the collective influence of all ten items, not a dominating inner group of four items that skew the result.

Interestingly, the results of the correlational analysis indicate stronger correlations between the QuEEP factors than with the IPIP BFFM factors, which may also stem from redundancy, in this case the re-use of common themes in the items of different factors within the QuEEP. With the QuEEP limited to specific situations in order to capture a “language personality”, there is a re-use of certain themes that must occur, such as travelling, studying in English class, and talking with a native speaker. As a result, the higher inter-factor correlations seems almost unavoidable, and a necessary consequence of this highly situational instrument. For example, travel themed items in the extraversion factor may be eliciting similar responses as travel themed items in the openness factor, resulting in higher correlations. This should not diminish the validity of the responses as the factor analysis and the Rasch analysis proved each set of QuEEP items to be sufficiently unidimensional.

Looking at the results of the Rasch analysis, four of the five QuEEP personality factors achieved superior statistical performance over their IPIP BFFM counterparts. The explained variance was higher, the unexplained variance was lower, the item and person separation was
greater, the item and person reliability was higher, and the item fit spreads narrower for the neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness factors. Only the QuEEP extraversion factor underperformed the IPIP BFFM extraversion factor, yet even in this case the two sets of items performed relatively similarly.

Viewed holistically, it would seem that the QuEEP outperformed the IPIP BFFM. Further, if you look at the correlations among like factors between the two instruments, correlations were relatively weak. This affirms the main thesis of this article in that native-language personality instruments are not effectively measuring students’ second-language personality, because if they were, these correlations would be much higher. This opens up the exciting possibility that much of the existing TESOL research involving personality may not have accurately captured second-language personality. If this is indeed the case, it would necessitate a critical re-examination of previous TESOL research involving personality, possibly invalidating several studies.

Conclusion

The research in this article showed, at the most basic level, the QuEEP and the IPIP BFFM were fundamentally measuring different things. Very limited correlations between the two instruments indicate that a person may indeed have two distinct personalities that are affected by culture, society, and language. At the very least, this research should open a dialogue on the need for a specialized TESOL personality instrument, and how one can be developed. A more effective personality instrument could change how existing TESOL personality research is perceived, and open up several avenues of future research.

About the author

Omar Karlin is a non-tenured Associate Professor at Meiji University in Tokyo. He earned his M.Ed in TESOL from Temple University, and is a doctoral candidate in Temple University’s Doctorate of Education program. His primary research interest is how personality can affect second language acquisition.
References


Sources of Influence Affecting Adult Arab EAP Students' Critical Thinking

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Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar
Doha, Qatar

Abstract

This study reports the results of a survey of adult Gulf Arab students’ perceptions of influences that affect the development of their critical thinking skills. Drawing from Terenzini et al.’s conceptual model of college influence on student learning (1995), the study explores the impact of the three dimensions of integrated curricula, class-related activities, and out-of-class experiences on Arab students’ critical thinking abilities. The study participants are first-year college students enrolled in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in a foundation program that prepares them for premedical education at a private American medical college located in Qatar. The survey results indicate students’ attitudes towards integrated curricula and out-of-class experiences as the leading contributing factors to the development of their critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Arab ESL learners, Integrated, curriculum, Arabic Speakers
Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Some educators often point out that Arab students’ academic performance in college is weak because they graduate from secondary education systems that rely on rote memorization and neglect critical thinking skills. Not surprisingly, ESL/ELT educators consider these skills essential to their curricula and agree that critical thinking abilities improve students’ linguistic proficiency and analytical abilities to succeed in their academic studies and careers. However, there is hardly any research focusing on what English as a second language Arab students perceive to be the sources of influence affecting the development of their critical thinking skills. Thus, this study aims to investigate adult Arab EAP students’ perceptions of what contributes to the development of their critical thinking abilities.

Conceptual Framework

The study specifically addresses three dimensions of students’ first-year college experience: Curriculum and integration of ideas from different courses, formal classroom and instructional activities, and out-of-class experiences. Figure one illustrates the conceptual model of the three dimensions adapted from Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995).

Fig. 1. A conceptual framework of three dimensions’ influence on students’ critical thinking
Operational Definition

This study uses the definition of critical thinking as conceptualized by the Critical Thinking Community of the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking. Thus, critical thinking is operationally defined as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” The first step in critical thinking is to identify the issue because one cannot discuss an idea without understanding it. The next steps in the process of critical inquiry are to analyze by examining the validity of information and evaluate by judging facts and opinions, biases, assumptions, authority and evidence supporting the idea. After that, an effective critical thinker needs to formulate his or her own hypothesis by thinking more about the idea in question.

Review of the Literature

A common complaint heard from educators and employers is that both English-speaking students and English language learners graduate without the requisite critical thinking and problem solving skills that will secure their economic competitiveness. According to Brethower (1977), students tend to forget a significant amount of factual knowledge after they graduate from college. Hence, more and more institutions of higher education and employers are promoting the importance of critical thinking ability not only for academic success but for career performance and economic growth. Indeed, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an organization that brings together the business community, education leaders and policy makers, articulated a framework for 21st century learning that emphasized creativity and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration skills (2008). Furthermore, in a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, researchers Autor, Levy, and Murnane reported that computerized industries increased the demand for analytic, problem solving, and communications tasks (2003).

Performance that requires critical thinking and problem solving skills is a strong indicator of economic growth and leadership. The National Center on Education and the Economy reinforced the demand for a 21st Century education and skills. In its report by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, it stated that beyond “strong skills in English, mathematics, technology, and science, as well as literature, history and the arts … , candidates will have to be comfortable with ideas and abstractions, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative …” (2007). Moreover, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation Program for International Assessment (PISA) administers an internationally standardized assessment developed by participating economies to fifteen-year-old students to measure their mathematical, reading, scientific literacies and problem-solving. According to Hanushek et al., countries that score well on PISA have a higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than countries that do not (2008). Finally, the Association of American Colleges and Universities established essential learning outcomes for higher education that included, among other skills, integrative learning—an important dimension of critical thinking (2007).

The benefits of graduating students with strong critical thinking skills are significant. According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking is not just an academic activity but a productive process that prepares students to be effective in personal relationships, careers, political
engagement, and responses to the media. To be well-prepared for the 21st century global challenges, students need to be equipped with critical thinking abilities because “students need more than the ability to be better observers; they must know how to apply everything they already know and feel, to evaluate their own thinking, and, especially, to change their behavior as a result of thinking critically” (Norris, 2003). Furthermore, parents’ education, study hours, and extensive reading are all significantly and positively correlated to first-year gains in critical thinking (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella & Nora, 1995), and integration of ideas from various course curricula is also related to gains in critical thinking (Winter, McClelland, & Stewart, 1981).

Clearly, critical thinking skills foster intellectual curiosity and prepare graduates for employment marketability and community involvement. As the Partnership for 21st Century Skills reported, “Critical thinking empowers [students] to assess the credibility, accuracy and value of information, analyze and evaluate information, make reasoned decisions and take purposeful action” (2008). Moreover, employers and higher education institutions consider critical thinking skills of paramount importance to enable graduates to compete effectively in a globalized 21st century and solve problems in their communities. This emphasis on critical thinking skills suggests a need for research on different students from diverse backgrounds and what contributes to the development of their critical thinking abilities. Students may have a myriad of perceptions as to what sources can influence their critical thinking. Nevertheless, few, if any, studies in the English as a second language literature have examined the impact of the three dimensions of integrated curricula, class-related activities, and out-of-class experiences on the development of critical thinking skills of Arab students studying English for Academic Purposes. Thus, the present study would contribute to the TESOL literature because the participants were the same age group, had a similar range of English proficiency levels, and shared the same linguistic, cultural, and educational context.

Research Question

One research question asked participants to rank three sources in order of importance and write open responses about any other factors that students perceived to influence their critical thinking.

What influences affect the development of critical thinking skills?

- Integrated curricula (connecting ideas from different courses in the program)
- Class-related activities (student participation, teacher encouragement, interaction among students in class)
- Out-of-class experiences (involvement in activities, interaction with faculty and classmates outside class, time spent studying)
Method

Study Participants

The study employed a survey research design using the Sources Affecting Critical Thinking (SACT) instrument developed by the researcher. Data were collected during the spring semester of 2011. The sample for the study was 14 Arab students enrolled in four courses—biology, chemistry, physics, and English for Academic Purposes—during their second semester of a foundation year that prepared them for the premedical program at an Ivy League U.S. medical college in the State of Qatar. These 14 students were reasonably representative of the college’s population that enrolled approximately 300 premedical and medical students from various Arab countries. The respondents all spoke Arabic as their first language and comprised eight males (57%) and six females (43%). The age group represented was 17-19 years old. The countries represented were Qatar with nine students, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, and Iraq with one student each. From this mix of students, it is obvious that not all varieties of Arabic were considered; hence, this study is limited in its generalizability and representation.

Students enrolled in the foundation program of the medical college are graduates of Qatar secondary education representing international, public, semi-public, and private high schools. Before gaining admission to the foundation program, they need to have a minimum of 80 on the Internet Based TOEFL (iBT) or a 6.0 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). These two scores are equivalent to 550 TOEFL Paper or 213 Computer-Based TOEFL (CBT). The approximate English proficiency level is high intermediate or low advanced depending on the structures and levels established by programs of English for Academic Purposes.

Instrument

To get the respondents’ perceptions of sources that might affect the development of their critical thinking skills, students were asked to complete the Sources Affecting Critical Thinking (SACT) questionnaire made up of selected-response items. First, the questionnaire used a critical thinking operational definition quoted from the Foundation for Critical Thinking that defined critical thinking as “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.” Then the questionnaire asked respondents to rank the three dimensions of Integrated Curricula, Class-related Activities, and Out-of-class Experiences from one to three, with one being the highest and three being the lowest. The questionnaire also included an open-response item that asked participants to write in their own words any other factors or sources that they judged were influences on the development of their critical thinking abilities. Therefore, the questionnaire had a definition of critical thinking that guided the students, three selected-response choices to rank, and an open-response item for students to write their own ideas for sources.
Results

Integrated Curricula

On the dimension of integrated curricula, which is the number of courses taken and their connection or integrating ideas from different courses, five students (36%) ranked it as the number one source of influence on their critical thinking, four students (28%) ranked it number two, and 36% ranked it number three. Table one shows the results of the curriculum dimension.

Table 1  Dimension of curriculum as ranked by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Rank of Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class-related Activities

The dimension of class-related activities includes student participation, teacher encouragement, interaction among students in class, and class dynamics in general. Four respondents (29%) ranked it as the highest source of influence on their critical thinking skills, whereas seven students (50%) ranked it as the second source, and three participants (21%) ranked it third. The results of the dimension of class-related activities are shown in table two.

Table 2  Dimension of class-related activities as ranked by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Rank of Class-related Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out-of-class Experiences

The dimension of class-related activities includes involvement in activities, interaction with faculty and classmates outside class, and time spent studying. Five students (36%) ranked it as the number one source of impact on the development of their critical thinking skills; three
participants (21%) ranked this dimension as the number two source; and six students (43%) ranked it as the third source of influence on their critical thinking development. Table three shows the results.

Table 3  Dimension of out-of-class experiences as ranked by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Rank of Out-of-class Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be inferred from these results that the number one source of influence on Arab students’ development of critical thinking skills is shared by integrated curricula and out-of-class experiences at 36% each. Moreover, the number two source of influence, as ranked by respondents, was class-related activities.

Additional Findings

The questionnaire also included an open-response item that asked participants to write in their own words any other factors or sources they judged to be an influence on the development of their critical thinking abilities. Based on students’ responses, the themes of reading, exposure to outside experiences, and explicit instruction of critical thinking skills emerged. When asked to write about any factors they perceived to influence the development of their critical thinking, students wrote the following statements:

- Reading for pleasure so we think about we read and evaluate it clearly.
- Our writing class helps me read critically. When I know exactly the usual structure of a paragraph and the topic as a whole, I become more able to analyze any reading passage and predict where to look for information.
- Reading research papers that have related topics to the course and applying the knowledge to different courses.
- The topic or subject being discussed in the curriculum.
- Reading about other points of view and issues.
- Exposure to different points of view and different opinions of an argument.
- Analytical skills, comparison & contrast skills, inference skills.
- Analyze a story or movie (humanities).
- Extracurricular activities (2 responses).
- Traveling abroad and meeting people from different countries.
What I study in English helps me a lot when I apply it in other subjects because sometimes in biology, for example, we need to read a lot.

Games of improving brain skills (puzzles, special genius online game, etc) develop brain skills in remembrance and recognition that develop the way of thinking.

Movies and reading. Detective and real movies help in understanding and developing the way of searching and identifying.

Reading about things like the human body connected to life and organisms that help in thinking about systems and develop the way in searching, therefore, critical thinking.

Environment/nature observations (linking life and nature)

Thus, the student open responses can be summarized in such themes as critical reading strategies, analytical and argumentative skills, engagement and exposure to diverse opinions and arguments, and various media sources. It could also be argued that these themes can be encompassed in the overarching theme of explicit instruction of critical thinking methods.

**Discussion and Pedagogical Implications**

The research question examined in this study was to rank three sources that impact the development of critical thinking skills of Arab students enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes courses as well as other first year courses-biology, chemistry, and physics. The three sources of influence were integrated curricula, classroom engagement, and out-of-class experiences.

Students ranked curricular integration and out-of-class engagement as top sources of influence. This finding implies that students realize the importance of applying ideas they learn in one course to other courses. For instance, learning how to write a comparison/contrast analysis in an English for Academic Purposes writing course is certainly applicable to a first-year biology course where students would have to describe major characteristics of the cell and identify the differences between, for example, prokaryotes and eukaryotes. This is consistent with other studies reported in the literature (Winter, McClelland, and Stewart, 1981; Pike and Banta, 1989; Jones, 1992). When students are explicitly made aware of the interrelatedness of courses taken within a program or major, gains in critical thinking do occur. What can be inferred from this finding is that second language educators need to emphasize the integrative nature of ideas and courses across disciplines and experiment with sequences and combinations of courses across a wide range of disciplines to help students build, develop, and strengthen their analytical reasoning and meta-cognitive skills.

Similarly, the participants’ indication of out-of-class experiences as a perceived source of influence implies that students’ social involvement in outside meaningful activities has a strong impact on their critical thinking ability. Out-of-class experiences include, but are not limited to, students’ interactions with their peers, faculty, and staff, extensive reading of non-assigned books, extra-curricular activities in campus or community organizations, and opportunities for interactions with people of diverse backgrounds. The strong rating of this dimension is further substantiated by their comments in the open-response section of the survey instrument. For example, students wrote about the need for opportunities to travel abroad, meet different people from diverse cultures, be exposed to different points of view and arguments, read for pleasure,
play brain games, watch movies, and more. Likewise, evidence from the literature emphasizes
the effect of out-of-class experiences on multiple forms of students’ cognitive development
(Baxter Magolda, 1987, Terenzini et al., 1995).

Furthermore, this finding implies that teachers of English for Academic Purposes need to
create opportunities for cognitive development outside the classroom. Examples might include
going to the movies, walking through a park or a nature hunt, visiting museums and historical
sites, conducting interviews and surveys, building web pages, attending on-campus and
community lectures or debates, and many more activities that stimulate students’ thinking. These
outside opportunities for learning provide the environment to build students’ skills in identifying
central issues in arguments, recognizing relationships, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting
data, evaluating evidence, and creating new knowledge applicable to their lives. Because these
skills are at the core of critical thinking, second language educators need to create a conducive
learning environment that encourages students’ curiosity and fosters their analytical abilities.

Finally, the most revealing findings of this study were the open-response comments by
participants. As stated earlier, students considered other sources that influenced their cognitive
development. Examples cited by students included pleasure reading, guided discussions, analysis
of readings, critical reading strategies, education abroad, extra-curricular activities, exposure to
diverse cultures and opinions, brain games, movies, and environment observations. These
responses are critical because teachers need to provide learning opportunities that embed these
suggestions in their instruction. This would eventually meet not only the students’ linguistic
needs but their cognitive ones as well.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The present study is limited because it is based on a very small sample of students
representing a single ethnicity at a single institution. Thus, students’ perceptions of sources of
impact on their critical thinking may not be representative of students at multi-ethnic institutions.
Nevertheless, these students may well be representative of Arab students attending programs of
English as a second or foreign language or first year university courses in the Gulf region.
Although the students surveyed represented six Arab countries, this research does not claim to be
generalizable to all varieties of Arabic. The study is also limited in its duration because it only
focused on one semester, while it may be possible that gains in critical thinking abilities can
probably happen throughout the full course of students’ college experience. More focused
research, therefore, is needed to examine the effects on EAP Arab students’ critical thinking
skills over a long period of time. More in-depth studies are also recommended to investigate
other possible sources of influence on Arab students’ higher-order thinking and what strategies
they use to process, analyze and evaluate information before creating new meaning.

Conclusion

The present study found that Arab students studying English for Academic Purposes need
to learn skills that would help them see the connection among ideas in different courses across
disciplines. It also concluded that promoting integrative learning, creating learning opportunities
outside the traditional classroom, and exposing students to a variety of thinking cultures would
develop their critical thinking ability and problem-solving skills. Through this ability, Arab
students can be better-prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century.
About the author:

Dr. Rachid Bendriss teaches English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. Prior to coming to Qatar, he taught ESL at the University of Central Florida (UCF) and EAP at Valencia College in Orlando, Florida. He also served as Assistant Director of the Center for Multilingual Multicultural Studies and International Services Center at UCF. Dr. Bendriss’ research focuses on reading and writing, teaching with technology, and college academic readiness.
References


Towards a Multidimensional Framework for a large-scale Needs Analysis: A Pedagogical Perspective

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Moses Samuel
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Abstract

To expand the scope of language needs analysis, the present study developed a proposal for large scale framework of needs analysis for analyzing national language needs of pre-university level EFL learners. Using a multidimensional model of needs analysis, it addressed the language use context, the English language instruction context, the learners’ motivation and goal context, and Means Analysis context to investigate the English language learning needs of the Omani grade 11 students. This study also considered triangulation of data collection techniques and source of information crucial factors in needs analysis.

Keywords: needs analysis; multidimensional needs analysis; large scale needs analysis
Introduction

Most NAs are concerned with needs specification at the level of individuals or, most often, learner type (Long, 2005). Although analyzing learners’ needs is theoretically of primary importance in the current English Language teaching approaches, NA is rarely carried out in a societal or nationwide context. Recent researchers of NA, such as Coleman (1998), Long (2005), Brecht and Rivers (2005) and Cowling (2007), stress the notion of generalization of the NA findings in the societal level. What is needed now is a serious effort by applied linguists to identify generalization that can be made about how best we can teach English. Long (2005) points out that, “in an era of globalization and shrinking resources, however, language audits and needs analyses for whole societies are likely to become interestingly important (p.6 ).” At the societal level, the needs for language are generally defined within very general social goals such as national security, social justice or the like (Brecht & Rivers, 2005). The rationale behind associating language with societal goal is to motivate policy and planning for language education at the national level.

Adapting such broad analysis confronts the analyst with some constraints, including the appropriate needs analysis approach, large sample size and the preference of certain methods such as questionnaires, surveys, studies of government publication or documents, and so forth. Furthermore, findings and rationale for recommendation need to be explicit, empirically-supported (Waters & Vilches, 2001) and expressed in familiar terms since the primary audiences for findings from the public sector NAs include politicians, economists and other stakeholders. This study contributes to the existing NA literature by expanding its focus to nationwide NA which account for all different facets of needs in order to have a holistic and conclusive impression about the learners’ linguistic needs. It is therefore proposing a multidimensional framework of NA that triangulate different facets or approaches of needs as well as resources and methods for laying out --to the best extent possible- the analysis of the EFL students’ learning needs in a nationwide context.

Literature review

Needs analysis is a familiar concept in English language teaching ELT, teaching English as a second / foreign language TESL/TEFL. The term “Needs Analysis” first appeared in India in 1920s, but it was established formally during 1970s by the Council of Europe in the field of ESP (Brindley, 1984; White, 1988; Richards, 2001). There have been many surveys of approaches to needs analysis teaching (West, 1994). Communicative language theories have demonstrated that learners’ needs should no longer be defined in purely linguistic terms. Because of its wide nature, defining NA is a challenging task. In the language needs literature, needs are often defined in terms of dichotomies (Krohn, 2008; Oanh, 2007). Widowson (1983) provided a distinction between goal oriented versus process oriented needs. This dichotomy reviewed needs as an ends means. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) conceptualized goal-oriented needs as language use needs and process-oriented needs as learning needs (Krohn, 2008). They used the term “target needs” to refer to the “language use needs” and categorized them in to three sub categories, namely necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities are what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1978, p. 54). Lacks are
the gap between what is required in the target situation and the existing proficiency of the learner. Wants are seen as what the learner wants or feels is needed. With regard to learning strategies approach, two types of needs are identified; the learner’s preferred strategies for progressing from where they are to where they want to go and the teacher’s strategies to help the learners meet their needs.

Ritchtrich (1975) points out that the learning process by being responsive to learners’ expressed needs becomes a source of its own change. He distinguished between “Objectives” and “Subjective” needs. This dichotomy was adopted by many needs analysts such as, Numon (1988), Brindley (1989) and Brown (1994). Objective needs analysis aimed at collecting factual information for setting broad goals related to language content, whereas subjective needs analysis aimed at gathering information about learners, which can be used to guide the learning process once it is underway (Fatihi, 2003). Berwich (1989) similarly categorized needs according to their provenance, contrasting felt (subjective) needs and perceived (objective) needs. He defines needs as “a gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state”. Felt needs refer to the “wants” or “desires”, which are derived from insiders and the “perceived needs”, are derived from outsiders, from facts, from what is known and can be “verified”. Another dimension to view NA is “situation analysis” (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2001) or “means analysis” (Holliday, 1991, 1992; Jordan, 1997). They researched the “internal constrains” and investigated the related cultures or environments such as classroom, policies, requirements, resources, Ministry of Education, and so forth.

NA, as can be seen, can be interpreted from different dimensions based on the approach or the framework in question. In my opinion, linguistic analysis or the linguistic domain in NA is the most distinctive feature of all language analysis schools such as Systematic Functional Linguistics, Exchange Structure Analysis, Genre Analysis Approach, and Critical Discourse Analysis. This conclusion is also supported by many recent researchers such as Coffin (2001), Long (2005), Al-Busaidi (2004), Shuja’a (2004) and Krohn (2008). However, linguistic analysis is still a relevant aspect of NA researches. A good NA framework cannot ignore the relative importance of other NA dimensions such as the learner dimension, the means dimension, the present situation dimension, the target language use dimension, and the context dimension.

Most of the recent NA studies are at the level of a program or a course. It was noticed that little attention is directed to pre-university learners or learners of a whole nation. Therefore, most of the recent NA findings are applicable only to their context or similar context. No generalization can be made about how best we can teach English to a certain society. The target populations of many NA studies are in the level of undergraduate students, for example, Patterson (2001), Al-Busaidi (2003) and Shuja’a (2004) studied university students’ language needs, whereas Al-Dugaily (1999) and Al-Husseini (2004) investigated the linguistic needs in college level students.

As to methodology, two observations can be made in relation to NA procedures. All studies used English students and English teachers as the main sources of information. This complements with current and previous studies finding, that learners and teachers have special right to, when it comes to deciding the content of the course they are to undergo (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Holliday 1992, 1994; Long, 2005; Nunan, 2001).This conclusion is logical because it raises the level of awareness of both parties as to why they are doing what they are doing and leads them to reflect usefully on means and ends. It is also important to note, that, even when learners and teachers are able to provide useful and reliable insight about present or future needs, better and more readily accessible sources may be available
including experienced language supervisors, graduates of the program concerned, employers, administrators, and so forth. The second observation, in relation to the methodological aspect, is that questionnaires and interviews are the most dominant tools used in all studies. Al-Dugily (1999) used them as the only tools for data collection in his study. It is commonly noticed that many of NA studies in teaching English as a second language (TESL) researches are carried out via semi structural interviews, or more commonly questionnaires, for instance, Aguilar (2005), Choo (1999), Abdul Aziz (2004), Keen (2006), Davies (2006), Vadirelu (2007), Taillefer (2007), Cowling (2007) Cid, Granena, and Traght (2009) and Spada, Barkoui, Peters, So, and Valeo (2009). Yet, they are not the only resources in most of NA researches. Recently, NA studies such as Al-Husseini (2004), Shuja’a (2004) and Patterson (2001), focused their NA by triangulating multi method approach to, as Patterson (2001) puts it, “clarify the meaning and increase the validity” of the research findings. Triangulation is a procedure used by NA researchers to enhance the readability of their interpretation of their data (Long, 2005). The rationale behind the notion of applying triangulation techniques is to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data and increase confidence in research findings.

In addition, some studies lack an implementation vision such as Al-Dugaily (1999) and Patterson (2001), while other studies, such as Al-Husseini (2004) and Shuja’a (2004) used the finding to propose and suggest developmental modification in the target context. Implementation has become an important component of NA in recent years. Many researches on innovation and implementation have appeared in the last two decades, such as, Holliday and Cooke (1982), Holliday (1994), Waters and Vilches (2001), Bosher and Kmalkoski (2002) and Cowling (2007). The notion “implementation needs” is based on the importance of constructing an understanding on how to implement NA findings and recommendations in the stage of planning (Al-Husseini, 2004).

Based on the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the former studies, the present study tries to take advantage of the development in NA theories by expanding the focus of NA to a new trend which is large scale, societal or nationwide NA. It proposes the use of a multidimensional framework to account for the different facets of needs that might occur within the same society. It therefore triangulates theories, methods and sources in order to sustain a more meaningful, valid and reliable information. It is hoped that the present study will help in understanding and developing the state of EFL teaching and to put in practice the innovations in the era of NA as suggested by Long (2005) and Cowling (2007).

A Multidimensional framework of needs analysis

Based on the above discussion of theoretical and practical assumption of NA, the current study maintains a multi theoretical perspective or multidimensional model of needs analysis to conduct a societal or nationwide needs analysis of EFL learners. Studies finding, to date, have emphasized the need for triangulation of data source, investigators as well as theoretical perspective such as Long (2005), Aguilar (2005), Tailllefer (2007), Cowling (2007) and Krohn (2008). Shuja’a (2004) uses three NA dimensions, which he calls “three folded needs”; target language needs, present situation analysis and means analysis. Purpura and Graziano-King (2004) developed a model which contains four dimensions; the context dimension, the learner dimension, the target dimensions and the present language dimension. They investigate the foreign language needs of professional school students in international affairs. Krohn (2008) uses the same model proposed by Purpura and Graziano-King (2004), but adds a fifth dimension, which is the institutional means dimension, “to find about the language requirements,
expectations policies and course offering and how they may be readjusted to address the needs” (p. 25).

**Figure 1. The Multidimensional model proposed in the current study**

The current study proposes a multidimensional model as in Figure 1. It investigates English language learning needs of EFL students studying in large scale studies by addressing the following domains:

1. **Target language Needs;** (Munby, 1978)
2. **The learning Situation;** (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), English language instruction.
3. **The learner situation;** the learner motivation and goal for learning English, Hutchinson and (Waters, 1987).
4. **Means analysis;** (Holliday, 1991) to identify the factors that may impact the implementation of the English language curriculum

The rationale behind adopting multidimensional model for NA in the current study is four folded. First, the model was developed in the context of large scale studies of foreign language needs (Krohn, 2008), which analyzes the language learning needs of EL learners in a large scale context. Second, it has the flexibility of involving multi-dimensions to account for all types or facets of needs that can enhance the language teaching outcomes. For example classrooms in public schools are very complex situations to be analyzed for students needs. The analysts should study all it takes to account for all parties involved in the schooling system such as pupils, teachers, portents, school administration, supervisors, high decision makers, labor market and so forth. Therefore, NA predicts where gaps and unmet needs would be likely to occur for example, the gap might appear between the learning needs and the learner needs; what the learner want to learn and what they are expected to know. Finally, triangulation of needs dimensions contributes to the trustworthiness of the gathered data and increases confidence in the research findings (Aguilar, 2005).
Application of the framework to the Omani EFL context

For the application of the multidimensional framework of nationwide needs analysis we are drawing on an ongoing doctoral research which we are going to briefly explain in the coming section due to the shortage space in this paper. To develop a national framework of needs analysis, the present study investigated the English language learning needs of the Omani grade 11 EFL students. Using a multidimensional model of needs analysis, it addressed the language use context, the English language instruction context, the learners’ motivation and goal context, and Means Analysis context. The research questions covered each of the needs dimensions and also examined the competing discourse found between the different stakeholders. In order to put needs analysis on a sound theoretical and empirical base, the present study analyzed the learning needs at the pre-university /school level students in the Arab world by expanding the NA procedures to account for the different facets of needs such as.

1. The language use context which requires a *Target Language Needs Analysis* (Munby, 1978). It looks at the language use needs of the students, which can provide information that helps to identify and state the students’ wants, lacks, and necessities (Hutchinson & Water, 1978).

2. The English language instruction context of Omani students which requires a *Learning Situation Analysis* (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). It targets the learning situation needs, which seek information about the extent to which the current instruction addresses the students’ needs.

3. The learners’ motivation and goal context which requires the *Learner Situation Analysis* (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). It gathers information about the participants’ purposes and attitudes toward the current English language program in the post basic education schools in Oman (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), which address learners’ needs analysis.

4. *Means Analysis* (Holliday, 1991) to identify the factors that may impact the implementation of the English language curriculum in Omani schools. It covers the means analysis (Jordan, 1997). It gathers information from the decision makers on source, time, teaching experts and support to enhance the EL program.

The reason behind considering the four different contexts as a conceptual framework of the present research was to develop a multidimensional model of needs analysis to conduct a nationwide needs analysis of the linguistic needs of Omani students. This can provide decision makers and teachers in the Omani post basic education schools with empirical data to inform the renewal of the grade 11 English language curriculum.

The rationale behind adopting a multidimensional framework of NA is because it was developed in the context of large scale studies of foreign language needs, as in Purpura and Graziano-King (2004) and Krohn (2008). This framework has the space and the flexibility of considering different dimensions of classroom components to account for all types of needs that can enhance the students’ learning and the language teaching outcomes. It also contributes to the trustworthiness of the data and increases confidence in the research findings (Aguilar, 2005).

Triangulation of data collection techniques and source of information is considered crucial factors in needs analysis (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Coleman, 1998; Cowling 2007; Long, 2005; Richards, 2001). Therefore, multiple sources, such as, students, teachers, supervisors, heads of the departments and EL textbooks were approached for the purpose of data collection. In addition, varieties of data were gathered and compared using multiple methods such as
questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis. It is worth saying that the information gathered by means of a certain instrument is useful, but not conclusive unless supported by the findings from other instruments and resources, such as students, teachers, supervisors and heads of the department questionnaires, interviews and content analysis which provide an actual picture about the students’ needs that can back up the reported needs gathered by a single resource or a single instrument.

A stratified sampling technique was used to select 982 EFL students and 46 EL teachers teaching English in grade 11 schools. Also 4 EL supervisors and 3 heads of department (supervision and curriculum department) were purposefully selected given their limited number in the Ministry of Education in Oman. The random students’ and teachers’ sample was drawn from four out of eleven educational regions of the whole Sultanate, namely Muscat, Al-Sahrqyah South, Al- Batenah South and Al- Batenah North. According to the current study, the Omani students are divided into regions, and each region is divided into schools, the schools are sub divided into male and female schools.

The current study used questionnaires to collect information from students and teachers in the Omani public schools. The EL teachers’ survey was written in English, while the students’ survey was in Arabic to make it easier for students to understand in their native language. The students’ and teachers’ questionnaires consisted of two sections. Section one collected the demographic information about participants. Section two included the language needs. These data were based on self-reports on the type and frequency of reading skills and sub-skills that the students practice. The skills were chosen for their documented importance in the skill literature. This included 50 items representing skills and sub-skills, which students were asked to indicate on a scale of frequency, how often they face difficulty doing each one during their study.

Almost 100 students were randomly selected for piloting the questionnaire from four different schools consisting of 50 male students and 50 female students. Students were given the Arabic version of the questionnaire. The researcher himself administered the pilot run to the piloting sample to gather information regarding the time taken to complete the questions, the clarity of instruction, the ambiguity of the questionnaire items, requirement to include new topics, and the difficulties encountered in questionnaire adaptation. Only 80 questionnaires (30 male students and 50 female) were found suitable for analysis and 20 were rejected for incompleteness. In addition, to examine whether the developed instrument would report valid scores, the validity of the instrument was assured using content validity, which is the extent to which the questions on the instrument were representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the study content. In order to make use of the panel of judges’ or experts’ feedback, the questionnaires were handed to 12 arbitrators from Oman, Yemen and the UK. This step resulted in simplification of some terms in the questionnaire to facilitate understanding.

The information gained from these interviews was used for triangulating the data gathered from the questionnaires with the researchers’ interpretation of that data by having supervisors and heads of department talk about their objectives and intentions. Thus, seven interviews were conducted individually. These five questions focused on the learner’s purposes in studying English in Omani public schools, the attitudes towards the current English language program in Grade 11 of Omani schools, and the feedback for the reform of the current program.

Whereas content analysis enhances the researchers’ understanding of what is the exact content of the grade 11 coursebook by making explicit the patterns of language skills choices...
found in the current textbooks. The unit of analysis in the current analysis was task based analysis. Ferch (2005), Long (2005) and Long and Norris (2000) advocated that task based needs analysis allows coherence in course design.

As to analyzing the data obtained by questionnaires, descriptive and inferential statistical were used to answer the research questions by implementing the SPSS software. Interview data were analyzed by close study of the transcripts to identify what interviewees say about their attitudes and perceptions regarding the current English curriculum, the needed language skills and sub-skills to improve students’ linguistic competencies in English. After conducting the interviews, the analysis started with their transcription from the audio cassettes. Finally content analysis as a systematic and objective research method was used in collecting data for research question one. A textbook analysis was used in this section to analyze the English language tasks, skills and sub-skills embedded in the grade 11 English language teaching materials.

As mentioned earlier, this study is drawing on an ongoing doctoral research and due to the shortage space in this paper, major findings are highlighted. Textbook analysis reveals that reading and listening are the language macro skills used most frequently whereas little attention is paid to speaking and writing. As to the questionnaires and interviews analysis, it was fond that most of the teachers, supervisors and heads of departments perceive speaking as the most important skill for the grade 11 students and listening as the least important skill. Interviews with higher stakeholders revealed that The subject of needs analysis (NA) has not yet received sufficient attention from researchers and language teaching professionals in the Omani educational system. It was also found that the current EL curriculum does not meet the perceived needs of Omani students according to the expectations of students, teachers, supervisors and heads of department. The majority of respondents considerer that the purpose of the grade 11 EL program is to prepare the students well to pass the General Diploma exam. The majority of the teachers, supervisors and heads of department are not satisfied with the grade 11 EL program. The study also highlights the existence of different perceptions among stakeholders such as between teachers versus students and male versus female students in their attitudes towards the grade 11 EL program as well as a gap between the actual and articulated language needs. To guarantee successful implementation, the implementation needs of the study findings and the recommendations are provided in reference to the underpinning principles and content, the teaching material and methodology, the implication for teachers’ training and the implications for assessment.

Conclusion

This article presented a framework for analyzing students’ language learning needs in a nationwide context for the purpose of establishing better learning objectives, and designing content, material and methodology for English language courses. Recent needs analysts namely Al-Husseini (2004), Long (2005) and Nelson (2000) reported that until now, few -if no- studies have been conducted to analyze the learning needs of a whole society or a nation. The societal approach of NA adopted by this study, particularly with regard to sampling, data collection and analysis, may be applicable to further studies in similar context around the world.

In order to put needs analysis on a theoretical and empirical base Long (2005) calls for “replication with different population in different sectors” (p. 12) as well as new methodological
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approach (Krohn, 2008). The present study provided an example of new unexplored population or context in two ways. Firstly, no attempt has been carried out to systematically study the language needs of school students in the Arab world (Kandil, 2009), or more specifically in the Omani context to the best knowledge of the researcher. Secondly, it investigated the learning needs at the school level or pre-university students, which has not been tackled yet. Most of NA studies investigate the learners’ needs at university or college level, such as Al Busaidi (2003), Shuja’a (2004), Al-Husseini, (2004) and Keen (2006).

The current study also replicated the mixed-methods methodology, where data were collected from several sources (informants and documents) and via different methods of data collections procedures and instruments (structured interviews, questionnaires and textbooks analysis). This methodology, which allowed for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, was found effective for obtaining a comprehensive and triangulated picture of language needs. Triangulation of data collection techniques and source of information were considered crucial factors in needs analysis (Brecht & Rivers, 2005; Coleman, 1998; Cowling, 2007; Long, 2005; Richards, 2001). Therefore, one particular innovation of this study was its utilization of two types of triangulation; methodological triangulation and data triangulation (Krohn, 2008). Multiple sources, such as students, teachers, supervisors, and heads of department were approached during data collection. In addition, varieties of data were gathered and compared using multiple methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis. The current study also provided a methodological empirical example of an assertion made by Waters and Vilches (2001) and Richards (2001) that involving decision makers, such as, language specialists, supervisors, heads of the departments, administrators, employers, and so forth, is fundamental at the foundation building stage. It is also important for the success of implementation of any study, since they decide whether to accept, reject or modify the implementation of the study findings.

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Investigating Syntactic Ambiguity Resolution Strategy Use of EFL Learners in Reading Relative Clauses

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Abstract

This study investigates resolution strategies used by L2 (English) learners when they are reading syntactically ambiguous sentences containing relative clauses (RC). The participants of this study were 114 learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Taiwan. A questionnaire was constructed to gather information concerning the learners’ processing strategies. Two grammatical aspects were considered: filler-gap dependency and local syntactic ambiguity between main verb (MV) vs. reduced RC interpretations. In addition, lexical information, such as noun animacy of RC heads, and noun phrase (NP) attachment to the higher or lower noun were also taken into account. Multiple one sample t-tests were conducted to investigate the students’ performance under various conditions. The results show that there was no significant difference of distribution between strategy use of syntactic and non-syntactic information, indicating that the access to both kinds of information was parallel and interactive. The results are discussed with regard to Shallow Structure Hypothesis in L2 learners (Clahsen & Felser, 2006). The implications of L2 parsing research for the field of SLA are also presented.

Keywords: syntactic ambiguity resolution, resolution strategy, English relative clauses, L2 sentence reading
Introduction

Syntactic ambiguity resolution is one of the main problems in reading comprehension. During the last decades, there have been numerous studies investigating how people understand ambiguous sentences (MacDonald, Pearlmutter, & Seidenberg, 1994). Syntactic ambiguities are relevant to both theoretical linguistics and studies in language acquisition in that they involve complex linguistic properties that allow researchers to explore the mechanism of processing abstract knowledge of a computational system.

Current debates concerning ambiguity resolution in sentence reading comprehension often focus on the issue whether the processing of comprehension is principle-first (garden-path or syntax-based) and constraint-based (Vosse & Kempen, 2009). The principle-based models (e.g. Frazier, 1987) postulate that only the syntactic properties of the new input word are being analyzed during a first stage of processing an ambiguous input string. In contrast, constraint-based models (e.g. MacDonald, 1994) posit that the processing of syntactic and conceptual information is interactive and parallel. When encountering an ambiguous input string, multiple analyses are activated primarily and a competition of relevant constraints of any source is set up, such as pragmatic, discourse, semantic, morphological or syntactic information.

The second issue is concerned with the strategies used in resolving syntactic ambiguities in first language (L1) and second language (L2). There are various assumptions about whether and to what extent L2 processing might be different from L1 processing. First, it is possible that learners will transfer their L1 strategies to L2 (Rah & Adone, 2010), if the structures of L1 and L2 are considerably alike. Second, L2 learners might employ similar strategies to resolve syntactic ambiguities as native speakers. Third, it is possible that the processing mechanism of L2 is essentially different from that of L1. L2 learners might rely more on lexical and semantic information than native speakers as a result of limited structural knowledge (Clahsen & Felser, 2006).

Previous research on L2 ambiguity resolution has yielded heterogeneous conclusions to the issues addressed. Moreover, many studies have focus mainly on investigating highly proficient learners (e.g. Rah & Adone, 2010). Hence, the investigation of the subjects of the present study, intermediate Chinese-speaking EFL learners, can provide interesting insights into L2 processing mechanisms for a comparison.

The arrangement of this paper is as follows. Section two describes the relevant theories and strategies of syntactic ambiguity resolution. Research methods are presented in the third section. The fourth section presents the results. Finally, section five and six provide discussion and conclusion of the study.
Literature review

Theories of syntactic ambiguity resolution

Current research on syntactic ambiguity resolution can roughly be divided into two major categories which make distinct claims about the understanding of syntactic ambiguity. The first class of theories are principle-based models, also known as modular models, two-stage models or autonomous syntax models. The most representative model within this modular view is Frazier’s (1987) Garden-Path Theory. The principle-based models claim that at the initial stage of sentence parsing, syntactic knowledge is the only source of information that are used for readers to interpret the meaning of the sentence. Other non-syntactic information is not available until a later stage of processing. Garden path effect is evoked by different interpretations of an ambiguous sentence. The parsing decisions are made at a time under the guidance of some universal syntactic principles, such as minimal attachment and late closure (Binder, Duffy, & Keith, 2001; Rah & Adone, 2010). Frazier and Clifton (1996) have later proposed a new theory called the Construal Theory. According to the Construal Theory, the resolution of syntactic ambiguity is based on information of two different types: primary and non-primary relations. Primary relations include the subject, predicate, verb complements and obligatory constituents of primary relations, whereas non-primary relations are associated in the currently active theta domain which is able to contain more than one possible attachment site (Van Gompel, & Pickering, 2000). The parsing decisions therefore involve a number of factors, such as the thematic processing domain, interpretative principles and language-specific rules.

The second category of theories is the constraint-based models (MacDonald, 1994; Snedeker & Truwell, 2004). These models claim that the parse does not only rely on structural principles but also non-syntactic information will be accessed. The different sources of information provide constraints to different degree. No particular principles determine a preferred interpretation at a time. Once the word string in the sentence is given, both syntactic and non-syntactic information (e.g., lexical, semantic, pragmatic and frequency) are simultaneously activated in parallel at each point in time (Lai, 2009). The representative of a constraint-based model is the Interactive Activation Model proposed by MacDonald, Pearlmutter & Seidenberg (1994). The constraint-based theories assume that processing difficulty can be attributed to a competition between the syntactic analyses that employs all sources of information in parallel. In an ambiguous sentence, all sources of information are activated simultaneously and compete with each other until a certain threshold is reached (Van Gompel, & Pickering, 2000). However, some supporters of principle-based models claim that syntactic and lexical ambiguity resolution are virtually different (e.g., Frazier, 1989; Van Gompel, & Pickering, 2000).

Both categories of approach have received empirical support. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate L1 sentence processing based on the above-mentioned theories. As far as L2 processing is concerned, some researchers (Juffs & Harrington, 1996; Dussias & Scaltz,
2007) postulate that L2 learners have access to both syntactic and non-syntactic information during on-line processing, as native speakers do.

Clahsen and Felser (2006) proposed the Shallow Structure Hypothesis (SSH), which states that there is a substantial difference between L1 and L2 parsing. Though adult L2 learners rely strongly on lexical, semantic and pragmatic information as native speakers do, the effects of syntactic information on L2 processing is less obvious than that in L1 processing. According to the SSH (Clahsen & Felser, 2006), there are two different routes of language processing, full parsing route and shallow parsing route. The full parsing route involves information about grammar, symbolic or parsing rules of the target language, while the input of the shallow parsing route is the lexical-semantic or conceptual knowledge. Native speakers employ these two routes in parallel to process sentences; however, shallow parsing route prevails L2 learners’ processing. It is therefore suggested that even highly proficient L2 speakers may not be able to activate full syntactic information during sentence processing. Researchers have provided evidence that adult L2 speakers underuse syntactic information during parsing (Felser, Roberts, & Marinis, 2003). Evidence supporting shallow parsing route in L2 has been found in studies investigating how L2 learners of different L1 backgrounds resolve syntactic ambiguity (Felser, et al., 2003). Chen’s (2005) study partially supports the SSH, in that advanced learners mainly used structural information, while less-advanced learners tended to integrate syntactic and non-syntactic information.

**Syntactic ambiguity resolution strategies**

Based on the empirical evidence from parsing syntactically ambiguous sentences, at least three general processing strategies were proposed to interpret the sentence in a more effective way.

1) **Active Filler Strategy** (Clifton & Frazier, 1989) postulates that the filler should be assigned as soon as possible. In a relative clause (RC) containing filler-gap dependency, whether the parser resolves for RC modifying subject (SRC) or RC modifying object (ORC) depends on different degrees of difficulty in identifying the filler and gap (Lin, 2006). Readers tend to integrate a filler with the earliest grammatically possible gap. The processing advantage of SRC over ORC is likely to occur because readers resolve the sentence by using Active Filler Strategy to arrive the suitable interpretation.

2) **Minimal Attachment Strategy** (Frazier, 1987) states that the parser prefers the simplest structure. No potentially unnecessary nodes will be processed. In the initial stage, only syntactic information is taken into consideration. When employing Minimal Attachment Strategy, readers adopt the analysis containing the fewest nodes in a syntactic mental representation. This strategy has been used to explain how readers resolve Main Verb/Reduced Relative Clause (MV/RRC) ambiguity in sentence such as *The tired soldiers warned about the dangers attacked the enemy again* (Example from Rah & Adone, 2010). Under the guidance of Minimal Attachment Strategy, the reader tends to interpret *warned* as the main verb because this structure requires no additional syntactic node as required by the analysis of treating *warned* as part of a relative clause.

3) **Late Closure Strategy** (Frazier, 1987) postulates the attachment of new item to the clause or
phrase currently being parsed. In processing a syntactic structure containing a complex NP of the type N1-of-N2 followed by a relative clause, such as in the sentence The scientist explained the theory to the professor of the student who was in the corridor, the parser may encounter two different kinds of interpretation. The RC who was in the corridor can be considered as a modifier of the professor (e.g. N1) or a modifier of the student (e.g. N2). Resolutions of the first kind are referred to N1 attachment, Early Closure, or high attachment, while the latter kind of interpretation is labeled N2 attachment, Late Closure, or low attachment (Dussias, 2003). By applying Late Closure Strategy, the readers may integrate the newly coming information of RC with prior materials, in order to prevent L2 memory capacity from overloading in the process of ambiguity resolution.

Previous research reveals that L2 learners of English apply similar strategies as native speakers. Despite the indication that L2 learners are also sensitive to syntactic information of processing ambiguous sentences, the extent to which the L2 syntactic information is available for the ambiguity resolution remains to be determined. A large number of studies on L1 syntactic ambiguity resolution have investigated how adult speakers process sentences of filler-gap dependencies. Given that a syntactic “gap” is not present in the input signal, the position of a gap can only be inferred indirectly. Upon identification of a gap, the filler will be retrieved from working memory and integrated with the subcategorizer of the structure.

Another aspect which receives considerable attention among the literature of ambiguity resolution is the research on learners’ processing of non-syntactic animancy information which has been identified as a major source of processing difficulty among language learners (MacDonald et al., 1994). In their study, Gennari and MacDonald (2008) have found that an animate object relative clause (ORC) was more difficult than an inanimate ORC, because more possible interpretations can be identified with the reading of an animate head of a given ORC than the reading of an inanimate ORC head. In other words, if learners may use the cue of animancy information, it may better help them to understand the sentence.

In a recent study, Lai (2009) investigated real time processing of filler-gap dependencies involving the variables of animancy and word frequency. A group of native English readers was compared with two groups of Chinese-speaking EFL learners at advanced and intermediate levels. The results countered Clahsen and Felser’s (2006) Shallow Structure Hypothesis by revealing that L2 learners were able to employ both syntactic and lexical-semantic information just like the native readers.

In sum, the issue whether L2 learners use syntactic versus non-syntactic information to resolve syntactic ambiguities remains controversial. Investigating how learners resolve syntactic ambiguities may provide us insight into their reading comprehension problems, based on which the instructor may provide a better explanation to improve students’ reading comprehension. The present study addresses this issue by investigating strategy use of Chinese-speaking EFL learners to resolve syntactic ambiguities. Specifically, two syntactic aspects, filler-gap dependency and local syntactic ambiguity between main verb (MV) vs. reduced relative clause (RRC), were studied. Non-syntactic information, such as animacy of RC heads, noun phrase
(NP) attachment and plausibility of the noun were also taken into account. Two research questions are raised as follows:

1. What kind of strategies do Chinese-speaking EFL learners use to resolve syntactic ambiguity?
2. What is the contribution of syntactic and non-syntactic information to syntactic ambiguity resolution among Chinese-speaking EFL learners?

Method

Subjects

The participants of the present study were 114 Chinese-speaking EFL learners at a university in Taiwan, who were majoring in English. All subjects had studied English for at least six years in high schools, and were enrolled in junior English linguistics courses. Their mean age was 21.3 years (range = 20-25, SD = 6.3). All participants were naïve with respect to the purpose of the study.

Materials

To achieve the goal of the study, a series of tasks that contain four parts of experimental sentences were constructed. The tasks of testing syntactic ambiguity resolution are described below (see Appendix 1).

Filler-gap dependency in full RC

In this section, four sentence patterns were constructed to examine whether the filler-gap dependency was formed and modulated by both/either syntactic (e.g., Active Filler Strategy: Frazier, 1987) and/or lexical-semantic information (e.g., animacy of sentential subjects: musician vs. accident) during L2 reading. The items were designed using the conditions similar to that used in Lai’s (2009) study. Four sentence patterns included animate RC head-subject-extracted RC (SRC), inanimate RC head-subject-extracted RC (SRC), animate RC head-object-extracted RC (ORC) and inanimate RC head-object-extracted RC (ORC). There were five sentences for each of the four conditions/patterns. Participants were asked to decide whether they considered a sentence to be a grammatical or ungrammatical English sentence.

RRC and Main Verb construction (RRC/MV)

This sentence pattern was designed to examine whether the local syntactic ambiguity is resolved and moderated by syntactic information (e.g., Minimal Attachment Strategy: Frazier, 1987). The materials were constructed based on the sentences borrowed from MacDonald’s (1994), Juffs (1998) and Rah & Adone’s (2010) research. There were ten sentences in this section. Participants were required to identify the main verb of each sentence item. It is predicted that the EFL
learners tend to identify the past participle in the RRC as the main verb of the clause by applying MAS.

**RC with NP attachment**

The syntactic structure under investigation in this section was similar to that used in Dussias (2003), which contained a complex NP of type N1-of N2 followed by a relative clause, as in *The scientist explained the theory to the professor of the student who was in the corridor*. There are several possible interpretations. The RC *who was in the corridor* can be parsed as a modifier of the first noun *the professor* or the second noun *the student* of the complex NP. The first kind of resolution has been referred to as *early closure*, or *high attachment*, because the first position of the NP is located at a higher point in the syntactic tree, whereas the latter kind of attachment is labeled *late closure*, or *low attachment*. Frazier (1987) assumed that the learner would attach new items to the clause or phrase that is currently under processing. According to this assumption, it is predicted that EFL learners would attach the RC to the second NP by employing the strategy of *late closure*. In this task, the participants were requested to identify whether the ‘who’ relative clause should be attached to NP1 or NP2.

**Implausible/plausible NN-RC item ambiguous**

In this section, the contributions of syntactic and nonsyntactic factors to the resolution of ambiguities were explored. The items were adapted from the noun-noun (NN)/relative clause (RC) conditions used in the study of Grodner, Gibson & Tunstall (2002). The plausibility of the NN construction was manipulated as nonstructural factor to support the RC reading. In Grodner et al.’s (2002) study, a number of nonsyntactic factors were strictly evaluated, such as plausibility, lexical frequency and referential parsimony. Twenty sentences were selected from Grodner et al.’s experiment. Among them, ten sentenced contained an implausible NN structure which leads to a less plausible interpretation of the NN than RC. For the other half of the items, the plausible NN items, contained NN readings that were more plausible than their RC interpretations. Because the focus of this section was the implausible NN items, it was necessary to control nonstructural influences which wouldn’t support the NN reading in these items.

Participants were required to answer one comprehension question following each item, namely, ‘What is the subject of the sentence?’ Twenty multiple choice questions were designed

**Procedure**

In order to demonstrate that the subjects had no vocabulary problems in the sentence items, one pilot study was conducted to a group of 15 students who did not take part in the survey. Items in which the students had vocabulary problems with were replaced. The revised version was used for the present study. The sentences were presented in a pseudorandomized order, in such as way that no two sentences of the same structure directly followed one another. The survey was employed in pencil-and-paper version and distributed in the linguistics course which
the subjects were taking. Participants took approximately 30 minutes to complete the task. They were instructed to answer the questions based on their linguistics knowledge.

Results

Accuracy of each sentence pattern

The students’ answers to each sentence pattern in the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. The overall performance of the students showed that the students’ level of ambiguity resolution was intermediate, nearly 60%.

Table 1.
Mean accuracy, percentage and standard deviations of each sentence pattern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence patterns</th>
<th>Maximum Score</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 SRC/ORC-Animancy</td>
<td>SRCORC</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>15.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 SRC-Animate</td>
<td>AnSRC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 SRC-Inanimate</td>
<td>InSRC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 ORC-Animate</td>
<td>AnORC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 ORC-Inanimate</td>
<td>InORC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 RRC vs. MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 RC-NP1-NP2</td>
<td>NP1NP2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 NN-RC</td>
<td>NN</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>9.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Implaus-NN-RC</td>
<td>ImpNN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Plaus-NN-RC</td>
<td>PluNN</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>59%</strong></td>
<td><strong>35.42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SRC: RC head-subject-extracted; ORC: RC head-object-extracted; RRC: Reduced relative clause; MV: Main verb; Implaus-NN-RC: Implausible noun-noun relative clause; Plaus-NN-RC: Plausible noun-noun relative clause.
The subjects received the highest accuracy rate (85%) in the section of RC head-Subject-extracted (SRC) structure and the lowest accuracy rate (47%) in the Implausible/plausible NN-RC items, which indicated the students had the most difficulty with the NN-RC structures. The general performance of the students in the tasks was compared by running one sample \( t \)-test. As shown in Table 2, this analysis yielded significant effects among all sentence patterns, except the comparison between NP1-NP2 vs. NN-structure \( (t = -0.289, p = 0.773) \).

### Table 2.
Results of the \( t \)-test for the comparison among different sentence patterns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence patterns</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Filler-gap vs. Main Verb</td>
<td>20.344</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filler-gap vs. NP1-NP2</td>
<td>31.552</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filler-gap vs. NN-structure</td>
<td>30.618</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.021***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Verb vs. NP1-NP2</td>
<td>4.862</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.034***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Verb vs. NN-structure</td>
<td>4.480</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP1-NP2 vs. NN-structure</td>
<td>-0.289</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *\( p < .05 \); ** \( p < .01 \); *** \( p < .001 \)

The purpose of testing the filler-gap dependency in full RC structure was to investigate whether syntactic information (subject vs. object position in the relative clause) and lexical information (animacy) might affect students’ resolution of syntactic ambiguity. One sample \( t \)-test was used to test the effect of syntactic and lexical information. The results of the \( t \)-test indicated that there was a significant difference between SRC and ORC structures \( (t = 7.574, df = 114, p = 0.000) \), whereas no difference was found between animate and inanimate structures \( (t = 1.726, df = 114, p = 0.087) \).

In the section of RRC vs. Main Verb Structure, the task was to identify the main verb. It is predicted that the EFL learners tend to identify the past participle in the RRC as the main verb of the clause by applying Minimal Attachment Strategy (MAS). For example, the main verb of the sentence ‘The famous man invited by every student was a very nice person’ is ‘was’, but the subjects might choose ‘invited’ because of MAS. The accuracy rate of this section was 58%. The result of one sample \( t \)-test verified that the majority of the students chose the correct main verb, instead of the past participle \( (t = 6.007, df = 114, p = 0.000) \), indicating that the subjects did not obviously apply MAS.

The purpose of the section of RC-NP1-NP2 is to test the strategy of late closure. It is predicted that the subjects would attach the RC to NP2 by employing the late closure strategy. In
this section, the participants were requested to identify whether the relative pronoun ‘who’ should be attached to NP1 or NP2. For example, in the sentence ‘The guard told the boss of the reporter who heard about the story’, the ‘who’ relative clause would be attached to the second NP ‘the reporter’, by applying late closure strategy. The results showed that the percentage of the subjects choosing NP2 was 45%, the lowest among all sentence patterns. One sample t-test was conducted and the result confirmed the participants’ choice of NP1 over NP2 ($t = 4.025$, df = 114, $p = 0.000$).

The construction of the Implaus/Plaus-NN-RC structure was to investigate the contribution of lexical information of plausibility to ambiguity resolution. The participants were required to identify the subject of the sentence. For example, the subject of the sentence ‘The cafeteria students frequently eat at serves both vegetarian and kosher meals’, is supposed to be ‘the cafeteria’. Two sets of conditions, implausible and plausible NNs, were taken into consideration. Significant difference is to be found between these two conditions, if there is an effect of plausibility. The average accuracy rate of this subtest was only 47%, suggesting that they students had certain degree of difficulty with identifying the subject of the sentence, even with the information of plausibility. Although the accuracy rate for the plausible NN-RC structure was slightly lower than the implausible NN-RC structure, there was no significant difference between these two conditions ($t = 2.099$, df = 114, $p = 0.051$).

The processing of syntactic and non-syntactic information

In order to see the contribution of syntactic and non-syntactic information to overall resolution of syntactic ambiguities, Pearson Correlation between each section and the overall performance was conducted. The results in Table 3 showed that each section was significantly correlated with the overall performance. Specifically, section 2 (RRV/MV) and 3 (RC-NP1-NP2) are related to syntactic information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Filler-Gap</th>
<th>2. RRV/MV</th>
<th>3. RC-NP1-NP2</th>
<th>4. NN-RC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Filler-Gap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.435(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. RRV/MV</td>
<td>.353(**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>.222(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RC-NP1-NP2</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. NN-RC</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.222(*)</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.435(**)</td>
<td>.691(**)</td>
<td>.484(**)</td>
<td>.619(**)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Section 4 (implausible/plausible NN-RC) are related to non-syntactic information. And section 1 (Filler-Gap) was both related to syntactic (filler dependency) and non-syntactic (animacy) information. Moreover, the results of one sample t-test showed that there was difference between section 3 (RC-NP1-NP2) and section 4 (NN-RC) ($t = -0.289$, $p = 0.773$), which indicated no difference between syntactic and non-syntactic information.

**Discussion**

In the present study, we have investigated whether the EFL readers employed Active Filler Strategy (AFS), Minimal Attachment Strategy (MAS) or Late Closure Strategy (LCS) to resolve syntactic ambiguities.

Firstly, the processing advantage of SRC over ORC is likely to occur, if the readers resolve the sentence by using AFS. The results of the section of filler-gap sentence pattern showed that the accuracy rate of SRC structure was significantly higher than ORC structure. In other words, the subjects tended to judge sentences with SRC structures as correct. This indicates that the readers resolved the ambiguity of filler-gap dependency sentences by applying AFS. Our results generally are in accordance with the SRC preference in that (in)animate SRCs were judged overall more easily than ORCs, as found in the studies of Chen (2005). Though the subjects had slightly more struggle with inanimate ORCs than animate ORCs, there was no significant difference between animate and inanimate items.

Secondly, the readers resolve Reduced Relative Clause/Main Verb (RRC/MV) ambiguities by adopting MAS, if they interpret the past participle as the main verb. The results of the second section (RRC vs. MV) showed that the majority of the subjects chose the main verb correctly. The tendency that they chose the main verb, instead of the past participles in the RRC clause suggests that they did not employ MAS as predicted by Dachevski (2005).

Thirdly, in a RC-NP1-NP2 structure, a reader tends to attach NP2 to who-RC starting with who because of using LCS. It is predicted that the reader would interpret who-RC is modified by NP2. However, the results of the present study do not support the prediction proposed by Dussias (2003) by showing the subjects’ preference of NP1 over NP2. In Dussias’s study, English native speakers showed a preference for low attachment of an RC to NP2, whereas the EFL learners did not show this tendency in the present study. This finding is demonstrated in the second section, that the percentage of choosing NP1 was significantly higher than that of NP2, indicating the subjects did not necessarily use LCS.

The results of the Pearson Correlation showed that each section was strongly correlated with the subjects’ overall performance of ambiguity resolution. This provides preliminary support for the hypothesis that both syntactic and non-syntactic information are influencing the subjects’ resolution of syntactic ambiguities. No effect of non-syntactic information, e.g. animacy and plausibility information, was found in section 1 and 4 respectively. Furthermore, one sample T-test indicated that the difference between section 3 (RC-NP1-NP2) and section 4
(NN-RC) was not statistically significant \((t = -0.289, p = 0.773)\). The data reveals that there is no difference between the subjects’ processing of syntactic and non-syntactic information.

In general, the results of this study are in favor of constraint-based model in the sense of MacDonald et al. (1994) because both syntactic and non-syntactic information were involved. In accordance with the results in Lai’s (2009) studies, the results reveal that the participants’ access to both kinds of information is parallel and interactive. Furthermore, similar to the Chen’s (2005) findings, this study also partially supports the Shallow Structure Hypothesis (SSH) proposed by Clahsen and Felser (2006) which postulates that there are substantial differences between L1 and L2 parsing, suggesting the use of different strategies in L1 and L2. In Chen’s (2005) study, advanced Chinese-speaking learners of English adopted more structural information, while less-advanced learners tended to integrate syntactic and non-syntactic information. In this study, although the participants showed a bias for using Active Filler Strategy, there is no evidence of their use of Minimal Attachment Strategy or Late Closure Strategy. In other words, comparing to ORCs, it is easier for them to recognize the filler dependency in SRCs. Nevertheless, there is no consistent evidence of applying the strategy of low attachment, as observed among L1 speakers. One interesting phenomenon is that some subjects had received ceiling scores in the first three sections in which syntactic information was mainly considered, but their performance was extremely low, or even zero in the fourth section, in which non-syntactic information was involved. The discrepancy of performance indicates that these students are indeed sensitive to the type of structural and non-structural information that directs the parser to make the judgment of ambiguity resolution. However, they are somehow confused by different kinds of information. It should also be noted that the subjects of the present study did not achieve the overall accuracy rate at a satisfying level, indicating that they were less proficient readers of English. The interference or interaction of different kinds of information may cause their confusion and then the overload of processing the information may lead to lower accuracy rate.

**Conclusion**

The results of the present study reveal two major findings. First, the L2 learners in this study did not necessarily employ the same strategies to resolve syntactic ambiguity as in L1. The subjects’ preference of SRC over ORC structures indicates the employment of Active Filler Strategy (Clifton & Frazier, 1989); however, no direct evidence of the usage of Minimal Attachment Strategy (Dachevski, 2005; Rah & Adone, 2010) and Late Closure Strategy (Frazier, 1987; Dussias, 2003) is found. In this concern, the findings of the present study partially support the claim that L2 learners apply similar processing strategies as native speakers. Second, positive correlations are found between each section and overall performance, indicating that both syntactic and non-syntactic information have influenced the subjects’ syntactic processing of ambiguities. Furthermore, the result that no difference exists between syntactic and non-syntactic information suggests a parallel and interaction activation of difference sources of information. This finding is therefore consistent with the predictions of constrain-based processing theories.
In conclusion, in spite of the limitations of this study, namely, the single group design and the use of an off-line task to investigate L2 sentence processing, this study presents specific findings in that it shows that intermediate Chinese learners of English use both syntactic and non-syntactic information in resolving syntactic ambiguities. Although off-line tasks might not be as objective as on-line tasks, the findings of this study provide straightforward information about what might occur in real situation. Further research with learner groups of various proficiency levels is thus necessary to better understand the mechanism and difficulties of L2 learners’ syntactic ambiguity resolution.

About the author

Dr. Yea-Ru Tsai is an associate professor of Applied English Department at I-Shou University. She has taught reading, writing, and applied linguistics in Taiwan. Her major research interests include computer assisted reading and writing instruction, psycholinguistics, and English for specific purposes.
References


Appendix A. Tasks of syntactic ambiguity resolution

Part 1. Please judge the grammaticality of the sentences in each item. (G: grammatical; U: ungrammatical)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The musician that witnessed the accident angered the policeman a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The contestant that the prize delighted impressed Mary a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The pistol that injured the cowboy was known to be reliable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The climate that the scientist studied did not interest the reporter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The woman that reported the accident caused a number of serious injuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The doctor that printed the notes got lost somewhere in the hospital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The director that the show leased received a prize at the movie festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The school that educated the student was visited by the governor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The show that the teacher watched upset a few of the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The child that the gun scared injured the babysitter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The salesman that examined the product was mentioned in the letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The firemen that the fire burned caused only a small amount of damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>The loan that worried the banker created a problem for the mayor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>The term paper that the professor reviewed is terrible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>The project that pleased the salesman was raised for discussion in today’s meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>The gardener that trimmed the plants helped make the house more attractive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>The actor that the play recruited was given first prize at the awards dinner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>The instrument that attracted the student had been around for a few months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The game that the player mastered was ignored by most sportswriters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>The article that the journalist composed caused a big scandal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2. Identify the main verb in the following sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The tired soldiers warned about the dangers attacked the enemy again.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) attacked B) warned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brown sparrow noticed on an upper branch pecked at an insect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) noticed B) pecked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The famous man invited by every student was a very nice person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) was B) invited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The small girl lost in the buzzing crowd looked for her parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) lost B) looked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brave fireman rescued from the burning roof saved the helpless people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) saved B) rescued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The angry boy hit in the football pitch was full of bruises.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) was B) hit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The black dog found in his garden hut barked at the postman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) found B) barked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strict teacher criticized in his English course held a boring lesson.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) held B) criticized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The small sharks caught in the fishing net were very aggressive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) caught B) were</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The old woman visited in the rose garden liked gossip very much.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the main verb of this sentence? A) liked b) visited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Part 3. Identify the noun whom the pronoun who refers to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Peter fell in love with the daughter of the psychologist who studied in California.</td>
<td>A) the daughter  B) the psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The dog bit the sister of the teacher who lived in Paris.</td>
<td>A) the teacher  B) the sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The doctor was looking at the friend of the nurse who is talking on the phone.</td>
<td>A) the friend  B) the nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The manager sent flowers to the daughter of the secretary who plays piano well.</td>
<td>A) the secretary  B) the daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The scientist explained the theory to the professor of the student who was in the corridor.</td>
<td>A) the student  B) the professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The guard told the boss of the reporter who heard about the story.</td>
<td>A) the boss  B) the reporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The teacher visited the parent of the student who was angry about the accident.</td>
<td>A) the student  B) the parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The director refused the husband of the actress who proposed the show.</td>
<td>A) the husband  B) the actress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The author told a story to the child of the reader who was living in the hospital.</td>
<td>A) the reader  B) the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The driver drank with the son of the pub owner who was standing at the bar.</td>
<td>A) the son  B) the pub owner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 4. Read the following sentences and answer the multiple-choice questions. There is only one correct answer in each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The country enemies may soon attack decided to increase military spending and tighten restrictions on immigration.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The park dogs can play in is beside the pond near the railway station.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The appliance cats tend to damage is a dishwasher that vibrates too much.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The doll children like to have is a Barbie doll of one kind or another.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The warranty televisions usually come with is for one year but includes no labor.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The cafeteria students frequently eat at serves both vegetarian and kosher meals.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The doctor women will rely on is a skilled physician who listens carefully to their problems.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The newspaper neighbors frequently argue over is the local community paper delivered on Wednesday afternoon.</td>
<td>What is the subject of this sentence?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. The inn businessmen can stay at provides bagels for breakfast along with orange juice and coffee.
   What is the subject of this sentence?
   A) bagels  B) the inn businessmen  C) businessmen  D) the inn

10. The stroller mothers prefer to push has large rubber wheels and a good breaking system.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) mothers  B) the stroller  C) system  D) the stroller mothers

11. The kitchen lamps shine brightest in is one with lost of white tile and little dark wood.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) the kitchen  B) lamps  C) the kitchen lamps  D) wood

12. The shirt hooks tend to rip is made of fine silk and is quite delicate.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) hooks  B) the shirt  C) silk  D) the shirt hooks

13. The coat shops are now advertising is being marketed to young professionals.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) the coat shops  B) professionals  C) the coat  D) shops

14. The egg boxes will not crush possesses a shell that is half an inch thick.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) shell  B) the egg boxes  C) boxes  D) the egg

15. The jacket pockets are sewn on is good for keeping your hands warm though it isn’t very fashionable.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) the jacket pocket  B) hands  C) the jacket  D) pockets

16. The beach trucks are driven on is less than a mile from the beach where people swim.
    What is the subject of this sentence?
    A) the beach  B) trucks  C) the beach truck  D) people
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Subject Options</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The commander pilots receive orders from wears two stars to display his high rank.</td>
<td>A) pilots  B) the commander  C) orders  D) the commander pilots</td>
<td>B) the commander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The restaurant tables are placed behind is trying to gain more business with outside seating.</td>
<td>A) the restaurant tables  B) business  C) the restaurant  D) tables</td>
<td>B) business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The desk pens write best on has a hard flat surface and plenty of space to spread papers out.</td>
<td>A) surface  B) the desk pens  C) pens  D) the desk</td>
<td>A) surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The school computers help to organize is running smoothly because administrators have less paperwork than they used to.</td>
<td>A) administrators  B) the school computers  C) computers  D) the school</td>
<td>A) administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Literary text Wants Readers, not Readings: The Implications of Louis Rosenblatt’s Transaction Theory in the Literature Class

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Abstract:
The paper demonstrates that Louis Rosenblatt’s transaction approach to teaching literature would constitute a great gain if applied in the Algerian context. In its emphasis on the paramount importance of the learner, his personal experience and the pertinence of his socio-cultural background, transaction theory is likely to enhance students’ involvement with the text and their appreciation of reading. This research paper has used, as an instrument, two questionnaires. The first is designed for students to investigate their attitudes towards literature. It aims at eliciting responses to whether they apply Rosenblatt’s theory or not. The second is designed in order to investigate teachers’ practices and beliefs about literature teaching and the extent they incorporate the principles of Rosenblatt’s theory into their curriculum. As Rosenblatt’s theory has many implications for the literature class, the paper ends with some suggestions for implementing a transactional curriculum in the Algerian universities.

Keywords: Reader-response theory, transaction theory, aesthetic reading, efferent reading, learner-centered approach, traditional method.
Introduction

Recent research findings have evinced that effective teaching and learning require the participation of the learner in the teaching-learning process. However, and despite the CLT’s (communicative language teaching) and the LMD system’s (License, master, doctorate) call for learner-centeredness, the traditional method of spoon-feeding, the withdrawal and detachment of the learner are still rife in the literature class. This paper suggests Louis Rosenblatt’s transaction theory to teach literary texts to university students of Algeria. Rosenblatt’s theory conceives the reading process as a transaction between the reader and the text out of which meaning is generated. Unlike the other reader-response models, the transactional approach accords the reader and the text an approximately equal importance. There is always a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text because “books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books. A Story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols.” (2005, p. 63) Though there are many reader-response models, the transactional approach has many potentials. It accords a cardinal importance to the psychology of the learner, which is emphasised by the most recent approaches to EFL teaching. It renders students more active and helps them develop their creative and critical thinking. Of utmost importance, there are striking affinities between this theory and the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach, which the Algerian educational system has attempted to foster by implementing the LMD system, which gives a key importance to learners’ autonomy and self-directed learning. What has also prompted the choice of Rosenblatt’s approach is the fact that the latter is unknown by many teachers of literature. The traditional methods, which are still used in our universities, are likely to enhance illiteracy and make students’ motivation for reading ooze away in the mist of time. Hence, this theory is proposed to increase and save students’ readability. The paper aspires to tergiverstae the outmoded methods, which are inconsistent with the principles of the LMD system and those of the learner-centred approach. This approach, which is confluent with the principles of the learner-centeredness seems to be very promising: it is likely to promote learners’ autonomy and develop a never-ending love and passion for reading literature.

1-Reader response theory VS Learner-Centeredness

Reader response theory comes as a reaction to textual and formalist approaches, like New Criticism, Structuralism, and deconstruction, which undermine the reader’s role and stress the objectivity of the text. In its emphasis on the student, the learning process, and the classroom interaction, reader-response approach has many affinities with the communicative language teaching (CLT). According to Marzieh Bagherkazemi (2010), reader-response approach “makes literature more accessible by activating students’ background knowledge” (p. 5) This approach “harnesses emotional reactions for classroom instruction” (p. 5) Reader-response approach “increases students’ individual and group participation and motivation since it personalizes the learning experience.” (p. 5) In addition to that, it “provides for a student-centered and process-oriented classroom” (p. 5)

Very much like the learner-centred approach, reader response theory is based on a constructivist view of learning. Aly Anwar Amer (2003) maintains that reading, in this approach, “is a reflective and creative process and meaning is self-constructed […] In other words, readers are independent makers of meaning. They view text as a construct. They construct their own meaning.” (p. 68) Louis Rosenblatt’s theory, in particular, views the act of reading as “a
'composing' activity.”(1993,p.383) Like writing, reading is a productive skill rather than a receptive one.

2-Transactional Approach to Reading

Rosenblatt’s theory seeks to engage the reader in an intellectual cogitation rather than imparting him directly with the meaning, thus giving him a more important role. The act of reading deconstructs the binary opposition reader/text. Hence, the convergence between the reader and the text brings meaning into existence. In explaining the transaction, which occurs between the reader and the text in the reading process, Rosenblatt (1986) states that

It is necessary to make a distinction between the text and 'the meaning' that a particular reader evokes from it during the reading. The text is a set of signs. The poem or play is an event in time; it is the evocation that happens through a coming-together of a reader and a text. To emphasize their reciprocal relationship, I term it a transaction. (p.70)

So, transaction theory challenges the sharp demarcation between the reader and the text, which is promoted by traditionalists. It gives allowance for a symbiotic nourishing relationship. Transaction, in Rosenblatt’s parlance, is “perhaps similar to the electric circuit set up between a negative and positive pole, each of which is inert without the other.” (1969, p.44) Thus, the text’s meaning is always located in the in-between. It is neither completely inherent in the text nor solely resident in the reader. It emerges from the coming-together of the reader and the text.

3-The Reader’s Psychology in the Transactional approach

Transaction theory entices students to respond to texts giving vent to their pent up emotions and ideas. Unlike the traditional approaches, it promotes their personal involvement in the text, taking account of their socio-historical and cultural demarcations. Rosenblatt grants a key importance to the psychology of the reader, which has been overlooked in the previous approaches. According to Rosenblatt (1969), “The transactional view is especially reinforced by the frequent observation of psychologists that interest, expectations, anxieties, and other patterns based on past experience affect what an individual perceives.” (p.44) The construction of meaning relies on the reader’s emotional disposition, thoughts, and memories. In Rosenblatt’s view, the text’s meaning cannot be sought apart from the reader’s personal experience and background, which are germane to the interpretative process. In her words, “the quality of our literary experience depends not only on the text, on what the author offers, but also on the relevance of past experiences and present interests that the reader brings to it.” (1960, p.305)

In the communicative approach to language teaching, there is a vehement denunciation of the objectification of the target language. Michael Breen and Christopher Candin (2001) spell out their vitriolic criticism of the traditional method of teaching, which seeks to separate the learner from the knowledge to be learned, to ‘objectify’ the target language as something completely unfamiliar to the learner […] We have tended to see the target only in terms of ‘linguistic competence’ or textual knowledge […] Thus ideational and interpersonal knowledge, which continually interact with textual knowledge and from which textual knowledge evolves, has tended to be overlooked or neutralized. (p.12-13)
Indeed, Michael Breen and Christopher Candin view of learning dovetail with Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading; they meet on the point that a purely linguistic view of language is likely to result in a feeling of estrangement, defamiliarization and detachment in the literature class.

4-Transaction VS New Criticism

Rosenblatt reproaches the traditionalists, mainly the New critics, for their ignorance of the psychology of the learner. According to her, New Critics “did perform an important service in insisting that the text was not simply a biographical or historical document […] In creating the image of the impersonal critic, they neglect to recognize themselves and others as first of all individuals, even at their most impersonal, still highly personal readers” (1978, p.139) Indeed, New critics, the formalists and the textualists, view the text an autotelic artifact, an autonomous or self-sufficient entity. They have taught students not to divagate from the text, which is the main concern, to what the text might evoke in them.

This objectivity of language creates barriers, which cannot be trespassed. Rosenblatt insists that “we must view language as an intermingling of cognitive and affective elements, an internal merging of sound, feeling, and ideas.” (1986, p.70) Viewing language in this way makes reading an intensely and pleasurable and enjoyable experience.

In her outright criticism of the New Critics’ notion of the “close reading”, Rosenblatt maintains that the term should not be understood as the purging of the interpretative process from the readers’ otiose personal experience. Instead, “Close reading requires close attention both to the text and to one's personal links with it.” (1986, p. 82) So, the text should not be approached as a hermetic, self-sufficient whole, which is immune from the reader’s emotions and personal life. Interpretation, accordingly, “is not the text, but the structure of thought and feeling that the reader has conjured up during the transaction with the text.” (1986, p. 78) The text does not exist in a vacuum. Meaning is constructed in relation to the reader’s personal experience and background, which interfere and impinge on the reading process. In highlighting the importance of the reader, Rosenblatt (2005) writes: “A story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols.” (p.62-63)

In its focus on the active role of the learner as a bedrock principle of literary interpretation, transactional theory reverberates with the call for a learner-centred approach. In defining the notion of learner-centredness, David Nunan and Clarice Lamb state that “learner-centred approach classrooms are those in which learners are actively involved in their own learning processes.” (2001, p.27) Indeed, transactional theory and learner-centred approach are Siamese twins.

Central to Rosenblatt’s transaction theory is the idea of literature as a living-through. During the act of reading, students enter an imaginative world and participate in its events. According to Rosenblatt (2005), “Literature provides a living through, not simply knowledge about.”(p.63) Because it makes students emotionally and intellectually engaged, transactional reading procures pleasure and satisfaction. It helps cultivate the love and interest for literature in students; hence, it acts as an incentive for a continual transaction with literary texts.
5-The Use of Schemata in the Transactional Process

In the transactional process, the reader brings his own experience, his prior attitudes, and his socio-cultural background to interpret the text. As Rosenblatt (1993) points out, “Each individual, whether speaker, listener, writer, or reader, brings to the transaction a personal linguistic-experiential reservoir, the residue of past transactions in life and language.” (p. 381) Indeed, Rosenblatt’s view collides head on with that of David Nunan, who maintains that schemata, which means background knowledge, enables learners to recreate and reconstruct the text’s meaning. In his words, “Given the fact that discourse comprehension is a process of utilizing linguistic cues and background knowledge to reconstruct meaning, these schemata are extremely important, particularly to second and foreign language learners.” (1991, p.68) Abbas Pouhosein Gilakjani and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi, in turn, emphasize the importance of schemata, in the act of reading, as follows:

Reading is an interactive process in which readers construct a meaningful representation of text using their schemata. Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. All readers carry different schemata (background information). This is an important concept in EFL teaching and reading tasks are designed to activate the learners’ schemata. (2011, p.142)

In the reading process, the student shapes the literary work to fit the pattern of his own experiences and background. He situates the text in his socio-cultural matrix, infusing the treasure house of his experience. So, teachers should aim at activating students’ schemata in order to imbue the text with rich ramifications of meaning.

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory borrows too much from John Dewey’s philosophy of education, which emphasizes the interrelatedness between the learning process and the learner’s personal experience. Dewey (1997) asserts that there is “an organic connection between education and personal experience.” (p.25) Dewey abhorrently criticizes the traditional method of teaching, which expels the learner’s personal life; students find what they learn “foreign to the situations of life outside the school.” (1997, p. 27)

6-Critical Thinking

In the last decades, there has been an increasing call for developing students’ critical thinking. In explaining the role of literature in improving students’ critical thinking, Rosenblatt writes:

For the individual, language can be conceived as a kind of reservoir, the residue of past experiences with words in life situations […] As we seek to make meaning in […] reading, […] this reservoir is all that we have to draw on, to choose from […]The process of reading a text can be understood, then, as a process of thinking, of selecting and synthesizing elements from the linguistic reservoir in order to organize meaning. The verbal signs arouse certain organismic states, alert certain areas of memory, stir up certain ranges of feelings, from which relevant elements can be selected. ” (1986, p.72-73)
Rosenblatt insists on the role of literature in promoting students’ critical thinking. She states that “the sense of the intimate meaningfulness of literature is basic to wholesome growth in the kinds of abilities traditionally thought of as literary and critical.” (2005, p. 63)

Transactional theory is not a mere passive emotional response. The student is required to be voracious and industrious, to produce and recreate rather than to digest. In the intellectually and emotionally active process of reading, the student is urged to reflect on his literary experience and to take a critical stance towards what he reads.

7-The Problem of Correctness

Rosenblatt’s theory conceives the transactional process as an event, which includes a reader and a text in a particular time and space. As she points out, “The transaction involving a reader and a printed text thus can be viewed as an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader.” (1969, p. 45)

Since the text’s meaning is a happening or an occurrence, which involves a particular reader in a particular context, it follows that there is no single or monolithic meaning. Any literary work is fluid, flexible, imbued with multiple shades of meanings, which differ from the author’s intention. According to Rosenblatt, “Questions about the 'correctness' of the readings have often been raised.” Even if the author “has somewhere stated his intention, or if his biography suggests a particular autobiographical intention, we should still have to depend on our own reading of the text to decide whether it actually fulfils that intention.” (1986, p.69) Since meaning is generated in accordance with the reader’s personal, historical, and socio-cultural make-up, the literary text is infused with different meanings, and it is open to a wide range of interpretations.

Indeed, teacher-centered method, which assumes that the text has a correct interpretation, precludes students’ emotional and intellectual responses. This method of teaching is embedded in a banking conception of education in which the role of the teacher is to “spoon-feed” the learners, who are passive recipients of the teacher’s ideas and attitudes. This belief in the existence of a correct interpretation makes students flee from the literature option in the third year. They find literary interpretation very difficult to reach.

The rightness of interpretation discourages students to make efforts to interpret the text on their own. It makes the teacher assume the role of the purveyor of the right judgment. Hence, he rejects students’ personal views, which are likely to stretch their critical skills. This has detrimental effects on the learners, who are likely to be more detached from the teaching-learning process and more reluctant to release their pent-up feelings and thoughts about the literary work. Indeed, their cognitive abilities will remain stagnant and wither with the passage of time.

8- Close Reading VS Readings About the Text

8-A-Reliance on Critics’ Views About the text

Teachers and students often come to the class memorizing what famous critics have said about the literary text. Students are even given titles of some critical books to read. In Rosenblatt’s view, the belief in an existing right interpretation makes students “anxious to have the correct labels—the right period, the biographical background, the correct evaluation. They read literary histories and biographies, critical essays, introduction to editions, and then, if they have
time, they read the works. The quest is for the sophisticated interpretation and the accepted judgment.” (2005, p. 68) To save time and flee from the herculean efforts the act of reading demands, students resort to glaring critics in search for the valid and right interpretation. The belief in correctness, and may be the lack of motivation, makes students diffident about giving alternative views to those authoritative ones. This compels them to slavishly memorize the teacher’s and others’ critical views about the text, and then regurgitate them in the day of the exam.

Robert E. Probst, in turn, sharply criticize this method of approaching literary works. By suggesting for their students a list of glaring critics, teachers, in fact, reinforce “the notion that there [is] a perfect reading hiding out there somewhere.” (1994, p.38) So, only “the best, the most widely-published critics, might lead [students] to it.” (p.38) Probst adds that the first thing students learn quickly is that their “own, private, personal experiences would do little to help [them] find it. They were idiosyncratic, unique, almost deviant, and the poet clearly could not have had them in mind as he wrote, so they were better disregarded and ignored if [they hope] to find the right reading, the correct interpretation.”(p.38) This traditional method is likely to detriment the learning process because it puts students at the periphery, and devoid the teaching-learning process from its humanistic aspect.

There is an urgent need to tergiversate this teaching method whereby teachers give an ideal interpretation of the foreign culture and ascribe a single meaning to the text, which always parrots the one intended by the author himself. Students must be prevented from being slaves to the York Notes, which represent the critical views of others. This, in fact, makes them prey to the danger of losing their critical abilities and audacities. Students need to be convinced that the literary text needs readers not readings. If they read the York Notes, it should be just to see the variety of interpretations and to compare between multifarious points of view. In other words, literature might be a very effective means to develop students’ critical thinking and enhance their motivation because students learn better if they feel that they are responsible and that their opinions are valued. Teacher’s undermining of the interactional experience between the text and the learner and of what happens in this transactional process is in sharp contrast with the communicative approach’s increasing call for a process-oriented approach. B. Kumaravadivelu states that the radical refinement of communicative language teaching “focused more on the psycholinguistic processes of learning rather than the pedagogic products of teaching. This resulted in what was called a ‘strong’ or a ‘process-oriented’ version of communicative language teaching.” (2008, p.132) Jack C. Richards quotes Jacobs and Farrel, who identify the key components of the shift towards a CLT. One of these components is “Focusing greater attention from on the learning process rather than on products that learners produce. This shift is known as the move from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction.” (2006, p.24) Very much like the CLT, transactional approach accords more importance to the learning process than to the final product.

**8-B- Literature as Biography and history**

Another method which students use to reach the text’s meaning is to read about the author’s life and the socio-historical context in which the text was composed instead of making a close reading of the text. This is mainly because reading the text demands an intellectual cogitation from which our students always flee. As Rosenblatt points out, “It is much easier in the classroom to deal with ideas and information about literature than it is with literature itself.”
(2005, p. 68) So, students are prone to avoid the intellectual efforts the literary text demands and resort, instead, to mere concerns with the text’s history and its author’s biography. Approaching the text in this way is likely to sterilize and vitiate students’ critical audacities, making them unable to handle their emotional and intellectual responses. Hence, their critical abilities will ooze away in the mist of time.

Biography and history should not be central to the literature class. They should rather serve the ultimate aim, which is literary experience. According to Rosenblatt, “Literary history, the history of ideas, biography, technical analysis, are all, of course, valid and essential subjects for study, when they provide a context for literature and illuminate the literary work—the literary experience-itself.” (1960, p.310) Though it might involve references to literary techniques, history and biography, which are peripheral matters, interpretation should start from the immediate encounter between the reader and the text. The text needs readers, not readings about the text.

In discussing the drawbacks of the exclusive focus on biographical and historical readings about the text, James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner state that spoon-feeding the learners with knowledge about the text is likely to create boredom and ennui. In their denunciation of this method of teaching, they write:

By focusing readers at the outset on preselected frames of reference, both historical and thematic approaches meddle terribly with reader response. Such approaches have made too many students dislike both reading and literature. While taking control of texts away from readers, they also misrepresent literature, which affects people personally, what they think and feel. It is a figurative, artful mode of discourse, an experience itself as well as a perception about experience, created not merely to be understood but to be undergone.

(1991, p.70)

Indeed, this focus on the things outside the text and not on the text itself will not just sterilize students’ critical thinking but also makes reading literature a repulsive task.

9-Aesthetic Vs Efferent Reading

9-A-Efferent Reading

Rosenblatt identifies two kinds of reading: the aesthetic and the efferent one. “The efferent stance […] is involved primarily with analyzing, abstracting, and accumulating what will be retained after the reading. Examples would include reading to acquire information, directions for action, or solutions to a problem.”(1993, p.383) In the efferent reading, literary experience is reduced to informational readings in which the soul of literature is lost. A predominantly efferent reading is useful in reading texts, which are scientific, expository, argumentative, and historical, but they do not serve a lot in literary texts. An efferent-oriented reading focuses mainly on acquiring factual information or analyzing the work’s structure. It is mainly concerned with identifying the setting, characterization, recalling details, paraphrases, summaries, literary techniques, the plot, imagery, symbolism…etc.

In her comments on the traditional method of teaching literature, which is based on this mode of reading, Rosenblatt writes: “Reading was taught as a set of disparate skills to be demonstrated largely through answering multiple-choice questions. Stories, and even poems,
were often used for that purpose.” (1993, p.378) Literature, accordingly, is deemed a means to build up one’s vocabulary and improve one’s language. Asking superficial questions about facts makes literature more akin to a scientific document. It trains students to view reading as an act of eliciting and accumulating fact.

This informative or efferent-oriented aspect of reading is still widely spread in the Algerian universities. It is crystal clear in the exam questions, which are still given in the form of multiple choice questions or close-ended questions about factual information. According to Eric Paulson,

if we are interested in readers learning facts from literature, then worksheets and multiple choice tests can ascertain whether the students have read the book. But if we believe that authors hope we walk away from their books with more than just a mental list of trivia, we must approach reading pedagogy in a way that reflects that purpose. (2002-2003, p.11)

An efferent-oriented approach, for Rosenblatt, makes students “ignore or even distrust their own responses to literature. They may therefore reject literature altogether as irrelevant to themselves. Or they may divert their original interest in literature to studies around and about literature.” (2005, p. 68) So, students will be demotivated to read literary texts because they view reading as a mere act of collating facts or information. This efferent reading denies students any voice to give their own interpretations. They, instead, restrict and limit the freedom of self-expression. Applying this routine approach is likely to hinder students’ cognitive development because focus, in this approach, is on easily checked information.

9-B-Aesthetic Reading

According to Rosenblatt (1993), “In the aesthetic stance, attention is focused primarily on experiencing what is being evoked, lived through, during the reading process.(p. 383) So, in the aesthetic mode of reading, the reader becomes emotionally and intellectually involved with the text; in other words, he experiences ‘a living through’.

Transaction theory gives primary importance to aesthetic reading because it engages students intellectually and emotionally. According to Rosenblatt,

Past experiences, prior knowledge, social and psychological assumptions, surrounding circumstances, may play an important role in the making of meaning even with the seemingly most objective or impersonal or logical of texts […] Nevertheless, since the aim in efferent reading is to eliminate the personal and emphasize the public, referential, testable interpretations, there is greater possibility for the kind of consensus in construing the literal meaning that we have found not decisive for aesthetic readings. (1986, p.78)

In the efferent reading, which implies factual knowledge, there is no disagreement among students; hence, it is the aesthetic reading, which is of utmost importance. In order to motivate students and give them a more active role in the classroom, literary texts must be read aesthetically; in other words, reading should promote a personal and reciprocal interaction between the reader and the text.
In order to promote a positive attitude towards literature, aesthetic reading must be encouraged. In emphasizing the importance of aesthetic reading, Rosenblatt (1986) states: “Literary conventions, critical terminology, 'analysis' of plot, character, metaphor, symbol — such concepts are vacuous without recognition of the basic, the primary, aesthetic convention, the aesthetic stance that links words and their referents with their experiential base.”(p. 82) If teachers of literature want to save literature from its increasingly dwindling importance, they should put at the top of their aims the fostering of a vital symbiotic relationship between texts and readers. Hence, aesthetic reading must be a prime concern.

10-Classroom Interaction and Dialogue via Transactional Approach

Since the literary text has different layers of meaning, literary transaction enhances students’ interaction and fosters dialogue and communication in the classroom. This theory is confluent with the CLT because of its focus on communication and interaction, which are central to the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach. Kumaravadivelu (2008) posits that “classroom procedures of learner-centered pedagogy are largely woven around the sharing of information and the negotiation of meaning. This is true not only of oral communication activities, but also of reading and writing activities.” (p.128) In comparing the traditional method with CLT, David Nunan and Clarice Lamb assert the importance of classroom dialogue as a major tenet of the communicative approach. According to them, CLT “engage[s] learners in communication [It] involve[s] processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction.” (2001, p.31) The classroom interaction, which involves discussion of meaning makes learning a real process.

Transaction allows students to interchange with each other, to compare their responses and to develop their perspective on the literary work. From a longitudinal study applying transaction theory, Eric Paulson (2002-2003) observes that his students “examined their own interpretations, shared their thoughts, and synthesized others’ viewpoints while maintaining their own unique perspective; they saw that meaning is constructed—that they are an integral part of the constructive process.” (p.11) In this interactional and cooperative approach, students are encouraged to share and discuss ideas with each other. They will find similarities between their reactions; but if the work evokes divergent and contradictory emotional and intellectual responses, they will argue to explain and defend their stance. In fact, transaction theory aims at developing students’ ability to respond to texts and discuss them as they discuss films and songs.

11-The Usefulness of Transaction in Real Life Situations

Reading a literary text in a foreign language, which is embedded in a foreign culture, enables students to come to a better understanding of themselves and of their culture. In reading a text, the student is, in fact, “recreating these works, living through them intensely and personally, is freed to discover his own capacities for feeling, his own sense of the world, and his relation to it (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 310) Reading, in this sense, makes students more cognizant of their own culture; at the same time, it broadens their horizons and outlook by transgressing the finitude of their own culture.

In discussing the purposes that literary transaction might serve in the students’ life Rosenblatt (1960) writes:

Thus through literature, the business of self-discovery and self-organization can go hand-in-hand with imaginative participation in the
cumulative experience, the keenest sensitivities, the highest aspirations of few cases, it is also the record of the trials and successes as man found some answers, which worked for him and which may work for other men. Language is not only the means by which man lives, it is also a record of patterns by which living may be meaningful. (p. 310-311)

So, transaction impels students to adopt and imbibe some patterns and modes of life, which might solve their real life problems. Literature fulfills this aim mainly because it is a mimetic art.

Reading literary texts, in Rosenblatt’s theory, helps learners deepen their understanding and be in close vicinity to their socio-cultural context and to that of the target language. Sometimes, as she puts it, “the young reader’s attempt to understand his response to the work raises pressing questions about the difference between his own times and the context in which the work was written.” (2005, p. 68) In addition to enhancing students’ understanding of themselves and of human and life problems, literature indoctrinates students with cultural knowledge of the society where the target language is spoken. It is a means of improving multicultural understanding. Hence, literature should be conceptualized as a personally meaningful experience. Viewing literature as such makes reading literary texts a lifetime habit.

Rosenblatt highlights the role of literature in the students’ intellectual and emotional growth. If the choice of the literary texts is compatible with the students’ age and interests, the literary work is likely to offer “a significant and enjoyable experience for [them] and experience that involves [them] personally and that [they] can assimilate into [their] ongoing intellectual and emotional development.” (1960, p. 307) Literature will be interesting for students if they find it in connection with their personal life.

12-Role of the Teacher and Students in the Transactional Approach

If students’ responses are valued, reading literature will not just be a pleasurable activity but a lifelong habit. Respect for students’ responses will help them develop a personal relationship with books and improve their interpretative abilities. According to Rosenblatt (1986), “Respect for what each reader has actively made of the cues offered by the text engenders self-respect and confidence. A personally lived-through evocation, no matter how incomplete, can be the starting point for growth in reading ability.” (p.82) Probst, also, points out that “Implicit within this vision of literary experience is a respect for the uniqueness of the individual reader and the integrity of the individual reading.” (1994, p.38) Trusting students and respecting their views will lead to more freedom of expression and result in critical readings of a high quality. On the basis of a longitudinal study, Paulson comes to the following conclusion:

Much trial- and- error later […] I discovered that acknowledging, valuing, eliciting, and discussing my students’ connections to our texts, experiences that related to the texts, background knowledge that clarified their interpretation of the text and other aspects of the reader’s side of the reading equation resulted in more effective and efficient reading. (2002-2003, p. 1)

To improve the quality of literary experience, literary texts should relate to the students’ personal experience and background. This will enable them to give more valid and plausible interpretations. To this effect, Rosenblatt (1960) writes:
To lead the student to have literary experience of higher and higher quality requires constant concern for what at any point he brings to his reading, what by background, temperament, and training he is ready to participate in. Literary sensitivity and literary maturity cannot be divorced from the individual’s rhythm of growth and breadth of experience.(p.307)

To lead students towards a more effective literary transaction, the teacher might ask questions about the impact of the literary work on them and the feelings and thoughts, which the literary text evokes in them. The literary work must be conceived as something, not just to be understood, but also to be lived and experienced.

The student has to make herculean efforts in order find where the novel fits into his personal life and experience. Since reading literature is something lived-through, the student must live inside the world of art. According to Rosenblatt (1960), the student “needs to fit the work into the context of his past encounters with literature and with life. The teacher's task is to help him better to carry out such responsibilities of the reader in the process of literary communication.” (p.309).

Method

Subjects

The target population of this study was students from Mila University Centre and Mentouri University. The sample selected consists of four groups of second year students from Mila University Centre. From Mentouri University of Constantine, we had chosen, as a sample, a group of second year students (out of 14 groups) and three groups of third year students, who are studying literature and civilization (There are only three groups in this option!) All our participants are graduate EFL students, who are preparing for a BA degree within the LMD system. The choice of two universities is to make the results more reliable and to see if there are differences in students’ attitudes and the teachers’ methods of teaching.

Our participants, also, include teachers of literature from three different Algerian Universities: Mentouri University of Constantine, Badji Moukhtar Annaba University, and Guelma University.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study is the questionnaire. It was impossible to conduct a longitudinal study because of time constraints. A questionnaire was designed to students of Mila and Constantine Universities, and another one for the three teachers from the aforementioned universities. For students, the three kinds of questionnaire were used: open-ended questions, close-ended questions and Yes-No questions. Teachers’ questions were open-ended.

Procedure

Students of Mila University were asked to complete the questionnaire during a lecture in the Amphitheatre after having the teacher’s approval. Some students were absent. So, the actual sample is composed of 62 students. From Mentouri University of Constantine, we had chosen randomly one group of second year students out of 14 groups. But the questionnaire was given
only to 16 students. Since there are only three groups from the Civilization and Literature option (Most of students there opt for applied linguistics and science of language), the three groups were chosen; however, some students were absent because the questionnaire was given to students in the Amphi during a lecture after having the teacher’s approval. So, the selected sample consists of 33 students. The questionnaire, students were asked to complete, is composed of two parts. Part A consists of 10 items, whereas Part B is composed of 2 items.

The three teachers from Constantine University, Annaba University and Guelma University, will be called A, B, and C respectively. These teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire composed of 6 items. The aim of the questionnaire is to know whether teachers implement transactional theory in their class or not. The questions were intended to be as implicit as possible.

Analysis of the Students’ Questionnaire

Part One

1-Do you find literature a very interesting subject matter?

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<td>103</td>
<td>7</td>
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Most of students (92, 73%) find literature a very interesting subject matter. But this by no means implies that they are voracious readers. Perhaps what students enjoy and find interesting is the summary or the comments on the texts, which are made by the teacher or other critics. This is crystal clear from their response to questions 5 and 6. Very few students (6, 30%) find literature uninteresting. We assume that those students do not have any motivation or interest in learning English as a foreign language, especially if they come from a scientific stream. Since the LMD system prepares students for either an academic or a professional life, it is reasonable to say that those students are prone for the second option.

2- What do you think is the importance of literary texts?

a- Literary texts help me build up my vocabulary and improve my English.

B-Literary texts are related to my personal life and real life in general.

C-Literary texts help me get new information about history and the author’s life

D-Literary texts help me think critically.

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<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>71</td>
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</table>
The overwhelming majority of students (78.37%) view literature as a means to an end, which is reinforcing their language skills. They seem to apply an efferent mode of reading. It is plausible to say that the teaching method, which is efferent-oriented, instills this belief in students’ minds. Few students (28.82) find literature relevant to their personal life. We suppose that these are the students who read the text aesthetically. They find in the literary text a kind of vicarious life. Some students’ view of literature as irrelevant to their personal and real life might stem from decontextualising literature and impersonalizing it. Some teaching practices, which are embedded in traditional approaches like New Criticism and Structuralism, are likely to deter students from enjoying reading literary texts. Those approaches focus exclusively on the formal and structural aspects of the text. It is also reasonable to say that this attitude is due to the status of reading in our culture, which is relatively low. Students who opt for answer C (63, 96%) are those who divagate from the text to concerns with other things about the text like the author’s biography and the historical context in which the text is composed. They do not transact with the text and make a close reading of it. Very few respondents (25,22%) view literature as a means of developing their critical thinking. This might be due to the efferent method or to their belief that literature, unlike science, is fictitious and imaginary; it has nothing to do with cognition and critical thinking. Literary texts are perhaps seen, by those students, as a means of procuring pleasure, but they will not serve any purpose in their personal or professional life.

3-Do you find the literary texts of the literature course interesting?

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Like in questions 1, most of students (91.89%) find texts of the literature course interesting. One might think that what they enjoy is what is said about the text rather than reading the text itself. Their emotional response is a passive one. But the selected literary texts, by and large, appeal to students’ interests and needs. We recorded few students (6,30) who view the literary works included in the literary course uninteresting. One possible reason for such a response is their lack of motivation to learn English in general or literature in particular. Other few students in this sample (3,60%) are unable to fabricate an attitude towards literature.

4-Does reading literary texts have any effect on your feelings and emotions?

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<th>Yes</th>
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<th>No answer</th>
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<td>74</td>
<td>36</td>
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The majority of students (66.66%) admit that literary texts have an impact on their emotions. We suppose that those feelings and emotions are not conjured up directly from the transaction between the reader and the text. The teacher’s or other critics’ interpretations might evoke these feelings in the reader. Some students (32,43%) deny that literary texts have any influence on their emotions and feelings. A probable explanation is that those students are not intrinsically motivated to read literary texts. It might be assumed that the teaching method, which is a traditionalist or an efferent-oriented one, is behind students’ articulation of such an attitude.
5-Do you often read the literary texts included in the course of literature before class?

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<td>87</td>
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Very few students (21.62%) admit that they read texts before class. Most of our respondents (78.37%) indicate that they do not read literary texts included in the course. We opine that these students do not have any intrinsic or extrinsic motivation for reading. They wait for a ready-made interpretation, which they get from the teacher, from the critical books or from the internet. It is plausible to say that the LMD system, with its compensation system, encourages passivity and laziness. Added to that, the spoon-feeding method might account for their unwillingness to read the texts before class. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, students might find the language difficult to understand; this makes them bored and fed-up. Also, their lack of faith in themselves to find the right interpretation may greatly account for their avoidance. Worthy of mention is the fact that literature is not accorded a very important place in the fundamental unit within the LMD system.

6-Do you often read literary texts outside the classroom without being asked by the teacher?

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<td>34</td>
<td>77</td>
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Most students (69.36%) do not take the initiative to read literary texts outside the classroom. We suppose that some students (30.63%) read texts, which are not included in the course because they find them more interesting than those included in the literature course. This is confirmed by comparing the number of respondents to those of the previous question. In response to the question “why do not students read?”, Louis Rosenblatt (1960) states: “A more realistic explanation, surely, is that the student […] has not been led again and again to literature as relevant to his ongoing life, offering him, here and now, esthetic pleasure in the actual reading and help in organizing his sense of himself and his world” (p. 308)

7-What are the ways that you use in order to understand the literary text’s meaning before class?

a- I read the text attentively and patiently before class.

b- I read the York Notes (Cliff’s Notes) or others’ critical views about the text.

c- I just wait for the teacher’s interpretation.

d- First, I read others’ critical views, then, I read the text.

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<th>D</th>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>84</td>
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Few students (49, 81%) read the text without reliance on the critical books or the teacher’s interpretation alone. Most of them (75, 67%) rely on the teacher to grasp the text’s meaning. This
might be attributed to the lack of confidence in their abilities to interpret it. Students’ reluctance to read the text is due to their belief in the existence of a correct interpretation, which only the teacher or other glaring critics can provide. Another reason might be the difficulty of the text.

8-In the literature class, do you often express your emotional and intellectual responses to the texts freely?

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<th>Yes</th>
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<td>30</td>
<td>81</td>
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While few students (27, 67%) admit their aesthetic response to the text, the majority of them (72, 97%) do not take part in literary interpretation. It is possible to say that they fear the teachers’ reaction if they make mistakes. Because of their lack of self-confidence, they believe that whatever interpretation they give is worthless. It is worth mentioning that this lack of participation is due to the lack of motivation or to the lecture method.

9- Do you have confidence in your ability to interpret the literary text alone?

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<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>85</td>
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There are only few students (23, 42%) who feel self-confident to interpret texts. The majority of our respondents (76, 57%) lack this self-confidence. We assume that these students seldom or never try to interpret the text. Their lack of self-confidence may also be rooted in their belief in the existence of an authoritative view and interpretation, which is stronger than theirs. This answer further confirms the answer to the previous question. Another reasonable justification is that the teacher belittles their responses.

10-Do you like the exam questions to be in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in the form of questions that must be answered in short statement? Justify

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Essay Form (paragraph)</th>
<th>Questions that must be answered in short statements</th>
<th>No answer</th>
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<td>26</td>
<td>82</td>
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Essay (paragraph) form:

Very Few students (23, 42%) prefer the essay (paragraph) form, while some of them did not justify. Others say that they prefer this kind of questions to express themselves freely. So, these students seem to have emotional and intellectual responses to literary text, which we called, in the theoretical part, aesthetic reading. Some students admit that they like this kind of questions to improve their writing skill. Those students seem to have an efferent-oriented approach. Literature for them is just a means to improve their language skills. Only one student says that it does not matter whether questions require answer in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in short statements. This student seems to be self-confident.
Short statements:

Some students did not justify why they prefer questions that need to be answered in short statements. For most of students (73.87%), who prefer short statements, writing is a difficult skill. Indeed, students find writing difficult because they do not read. Reading helps students develop their writing skill; however, this should never be the ultimate aim of teaching literature. For some students close-ended questions are better than writing an essay (paragraph) because they may not give the right answer, which the teacher expects. This justification indicates that the teaching method is that which ascribes the literary text a single meaning. Few students admit that they cannot memorize; it seems that those students are probably spoon-fed with critical views, which they must learn by heart and regurgitate in the day of the exam. Some students say that they may not be precise. This evinces that their critical thinking is not mature; it is still undeveloped. This is why when we ask students precise questions, not just in the literature subject, they find it difficult to stick to the given topic; they jot down all what they know about or what is related to this topic. Few students admit that writing an essay (paragraph) makes their mind work. This answer implies that writing demands high cognitive abilities, which the students lack. Some students respond that close-ended questions make it possible for them to get a better mark. This is because those questions, which need to be answered in short statements, are about factual information which are easily checked.

Part Two

11- Does your teacher use the lecture method instead of encouraging students’ participation in the class?

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<td>80</td>
<td>31</td>
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While some students (27.92%) admit their teachers’ encouragement of their participation in the classroom, most of them (72.07%) seem to deny. The use of the lecture method is, perhaps, due to the problem of large classes, which has become very rife since the application of the CBA in the secondary schools. Each year the Algerian universities welcome a huge number of students. Also, teachers might not be aware of the pedagogy of transactional approach. Teachers’ use of this method might also be attributed to their belief in the difficulty of literature as a subject matter; and therefore, they tend to lack confidence in their students’ abilities to take part in the literature class and to interpret the text. Another reason, which might lie behind the teachers’ discouragement of their students’ participation, is their belief in a correct or right meaning, which the students will never reach. Hence, they belittle students’ responses. Because they are not participants in meaning-making, students will feel that their role is peripheral and that literary interpretation is not their responsibility.

12-What kind of questions do you get in the literature exam?

A-multiple choice questions.

B-questions about factual information that must be answered in short statements.

C-An essay (paragraph), which elicits your intellectual and emotional responses.
Some students (16.21%) reply that the exam questions are in the form of multiple choice questions. The majority of them (63.96%) admit that exam questions, that need to be answered in one statement, are about factual information. Seemingly, most of the questions are based on an efferent mode of reading. They are direct questions (comprehension questions), which do not make students squeeze their minds and use their critical thinking. In Bloom’s taxonomy, multiple choice questions and factual/direct questions are used to test the students’ comprehension of the text. The use of multiple choice questions or close-ended questions might stem from the lack of awareness of the pedagogical implications of Rosenblatt’s theory. It may also be due to the rife phenomenon of large classes. Rosenblatt, who shares our view, states that “the pressure of increasing numbers in the schools creates a trend toward larger classes and therefore toward the kind of teaching that can be done for large groups sitting in rows, passively receiving information.” (2005, p.62)

Teachers use these kinds of questions, which are based on an efferent method, because of the lack of time, especially under the reign of the LMD system in which students have one exam, an interrogation test, and one make-up exam in each semester. So, these types of questions make the task of correction easier for the teacher. It is plausible to think that multiple choice questions or factual information questions are likely to reduce the number of students in the make-up exam and combat time constraints.

From the results of the students’ questionnaire, it seems that the role of the reader in the literature class is not a very active one. Students do not seem to have a strong interest or motivation for reading literary texts. This subject matter is, by and large, viewed as irrelevant to their personal life and not really pertinent to their socio-cultural reality. Literature is mainly deemed as a means to develop students’ language skills; it does not have any intrinsic value except for few students. Teaching methods, generally speaking, seem to be traditional in orientation despite the LMD system and the communicative approach’s rallying cry for learner-centredness. Indeed, there is a mismatch between the principles of learner-centredness and what actually takes place in the literature class.

Analysis of Teachers’ Questionnaire

1-Is your classroom teacher-centered or student-centered? How would you prefer it to be?

In response to this question, teacher A says that his classroom is “teacher-centered” He adds that “In a different world, I would have liked to work in a students-centered situation, but in our country, the time allotted to the literature module (1x1h30 a week) often imposes a different situation which tends to be more teacher-centered. Add to this the number of students and their lack of interest in and knowledge of the subject-matter. This is the problem of 1st and 2nd year classes.” Teacher A, though he prefers a student-centered approach, thinks that situation in his university makes a teacher-centered approach inevitable. Opting for such a teacher-centred approach is mainly due to the lack of time allotted to literature (mainly in the 1st and 2nd year),
the problem of large classes, and the lack of students’ interest in literature. A reasonable justification for students’ lack of interest in literature is the traditional teacher-centered method and the insufficiency of time allotted to this module, which makes it peripheral in the curriculum in relation to the other modules. In addition to that, the low coefficient of literature might help develop a negative attitude towards literature. Though it is one of the four language skills, reading is undermined in the curriculum.

In response to the same question, teacher B considers his classroom teacher-centred, in general, but he thinks that “The teacher is important in making it, but students must be cooperating for a better teaching.” So, for teacher B, students’ participation in the literature class is important if one wants to improve the quality of his teaching, but his answer does not imply the wide array of benefits that a student-centred approach might bring about for students.

Teacher C, similar to A and B, admits that her classroom is teacher-centred and that the kind of classroom that she prefers is a “student-centred” one. “The reason”, according to her, “is that studying literature depends on discussion. The teacher knows lots of information but without the participation of students he may skip many important details in his lesson.” Like teacher B, teacher C’s response implies that students’ participation is important just for reminding the teacher of some points and details that she spoon-feeds to his students. The ‘What’ rather than the ‘How’ seems the thing which matters most.

2-In the literature class, do you take into account the students’ personal life and their socio-cultural context in the interpretation of the literary text? Justify.

With regard to this question, teacher A’s reply was as follows: “Personal life, sometimes; but socio-cultural context, quite often; with references to family, habits or customs and traditions.” So, this teacher endorses the significance of students’ socio-cultural make-up in literary interpretation, and this is one of the tenets of Louis Rosenblatt’s pedagogy. Yet, this teacher does not view the students’ personal life as important in literary interpretation. This, in fact, is not confluent with the pedagogy of transactional theory, which gives cardinal importance to students’ emotions, thoughts and personal views. Interpretation should start from the immediate encounter between the reader/student and the text.

In response to this question, teacher B says: “In some cases yes, in others no. When we discuss a text we try to deal with regardless to any influence if not it becomes biased. “The text is what the reader makes it.” ” Teacher B’s response sounds interesting for it gives account to any factor or influence (personal, social, or cultural) which is likely to infuse the text with rich ramifications and multiple shades of meaning. The teacher’s ending statement, “The text is what the reader makes of it”, sums up the whole concern of reader-response theory.

In responding to the same question, teacher C says: “Personally, I did not encounter such a situation. However, in case this happens, I may accept such interpretation as one of the possible readings and we may discuss it briefly but I will not consider it in the summary of the lesson.” Teacher C’s response indicates that he seldom considers the students’ personal life and their social and cultural background in meaning-making. This vindicates that the text is dealt with as a closed system, which is immune from the learners’ personal life and real life in general. This is likely to demotivate students and make literature uninteresting and irrelevant to their life. This teacher’s response seems to be teacher-centered.
3-What do you do in order to motivate your students?

In her answer to this question, teacher A states: “Show them that they are important and that they can develop their own interpretation by using their unique individual experiences; that literature is not really something difficult by relating it to their own daily lives and culture; by making them understand that the writers they are studying are just human beings who used their writing in order to communicate with their readers and that if those writers failed to communicate, then there was no point in writing at all.” One might venture to say that teacher A endorses two major principles of Louis Rosenblatt’s theory. First, he should make them feel that they are able to construct their own meanings without reliance on the teacher or others’ critical views. From their experiences, they can enrich the text’s interpretation. Second, in order to simplify or facilitate literary interpretation, which is always deemed a difficult task, teachers should help students relate the text to their everyday life. The teacher can make students understand that the text is a means which allows communication between the reader and the writer, who is also a human being. Thus, the text’s meaning lies somewhere between the text and the reader.

Teacher B, in order to motivate his students, “speaks to the mind by the use of rhetoric and purely artistic tools.” Though this method makes the students impressed, we wonder if it really encourages their participation. It seems to make spoon-feeding less boring and more stimulating.

In order to motivate students, teacher C suggests “interesting readings; refer to movies based on classics in literature and bring them such movies in case they are available for me; and I try to make them feel the pleasure of reading literary texts.” Indeed, the ways this teacher uses to motivate her students make the latter less industrious. By suggesting interesting critical books or referring to movies, the teacher makes the learners get far from the text, which is a focal element in literary interpretation.

4-Do your students read the literary texts included in the course of literature? Justify.

Teacher A admits that his students, “in general, do not do. Some try to cheat, but they seldom succeed.” He adds that students read when they are given “extra work to do as part of the TD.” As teacher A’s response points out, students’ motivation to read texts is mainly extrinsic, to get a good mark. We might opine that the lack of reading is inherent in the CBA, which is now applied in the middle and the secondary schools. This new approach, which has failed in the Algerian context, makes the students’ level dwindle. And in order to hide this reality, the Ministry of National education has reduced the number of the drop outs. It has used the so-called “un bac politique” to hide the extremely worrying level to which CBA has been of no contribution.” (Mohamed Miliani, 2010, p.71) So, how can we expect those students to come to the university with a high potential and intrinsic motivation for reading? The other plausible reasons for students’ lack of reading has already been discussed in students’ response to question 5 above.

Teacher B’s response to that question was as follows: “Not really, this is the problem, because the text we deal with are too dark and difficult for them. Conrad or Joyce are difficult to penetrate, so they tend to use the internet for literary criticism and summaries, rather than reading the text. THIS IS VERY VERY VERY PITY. THEY LOSE THEIR OWN
UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT.” Teacher’s answer indicates that students hardly make efforts to understand the text. By relying on the internet, they will remain consumers rather than productive, very much like in the traditional method. We think that the difficulty of the text might be overcome if we can make students transact with the text and urge them to develop their reading habits. We think that these texts, which the teacher describes as difficult, are confluent with the students’ level; the same texts are taught in many universities worldwide. The difficulty of the text is, contrariwise, an incentive for the learners to be partners in interpreting it. The students, in this case, will exert all their critical and literary skills to unveil the text’s meaning which is to be sought beneath the surface.

Responding to the same question, teacher C says: “Not many. There are many reasons for this: 1) literature is often considered as difficult and boring field thus students lose interest in it without even trying to read or analyze texts; 2) the alleged difficulty of the language and style of the selected texts prevents them from feeling the pleasure of reading; and 3) the lack of motivation for studies in general that nowadays students suffer from toward literature and the humanities.” According to this teacher, the context or the culture of the students instills in their minds the erroneous idea that literature is of little interest and benefits in their daily life; this socially formed negative attitude will make the act of reading very repulsive for them. But we think that the university has a very important role in shaping many of students’ attitudes. Concerning the lack of reading, which the teacher attributes to the difficulty of the texts, we suppose that the texts are concomitant with the students’ level; the problem is in the Algerian students’ level, which is dwindling and withering under the LMD system.

5-Do you think that the LMD system might help students develop a positive attitude towards literature and promote their interest in this subject matter? Justify.

For this teacher, who continued his post-graduate studies in a British university where the LMD system was applied, the “The LMD system depends on the students’ personal contribution and work inside and outside the classroom. It’s a system which encourages students to learn how to be independent and rely only on themselves. Here, things do not work because students have been brought up in a (traditional) system that has made them heavily dependent on teachers and so they tend to receive only and not to give anything. Besides, literature is about reading and the LMD system encourages people to read.” For this teacher, the LMD system is in tune with the principles of the learner centeredness. It encourages students’ autonomy and self-directed learning. This teacher also believes that the LMD system encourages reading. The crux of the problem, according to him, is that students are still under the hypnotizing influence of the traditional spoon-feeding method. So, though it sounds good theoretically, this system will not thrive without the contribution of the students and the teachers.

In response to this question, teacher B says: “It could or seems to be.” The absence of any justification from the part of the teacher implies that he does not know a lot about the LMD system. But the fact that it is a new one makes him optimistic about it.

Like teachers A and B, teacher C’s answer was a positive one; he says: “Yes I think so” In an attempt to proffer a reasonable justification, she says that “the inclusion of the literature module in the first year is very productive because students will be aware of the importance of this module and hence will give it appropriate interest” Teacher C thinks that since literature is included in the first year, this subject seems to hold a very important place within this system.
But as teacher A points out, the success of the ideals of that system depend on the students’ and teachers’ contributions and on the overall conditions as well.

6-Do you think that it is possible to implement a reader-response approach to literature in your literature class? How would you accomplish that?

In regard to this question, teacher A thinks that “it is quite possible if one succeeds in getting the students involved in the construction of the meaning or the interpretation of the literary text and share their unique experiences. The whole point is about making them collaborate and realize their importance as readers as well as the importance of their role in the making of the text.” So, for teacher A, a reader-response approach might be applicable if the teacher motivates students to generate meaning by showing them the importance of their responses, and by making them cognizant of their abilities to interpret the text.

In response to this question, teacher B says: “No comment, because, I think, literature does not need theories. It needs self-disposition.” It seems that, for him, it depends on the circumstances and the overall conditions and atmosphere of the classroom.

Teacher C’s response was as follows: “Reader-response approach is important for literature and so helpful in developing the students appreciation and understanding of texts. However, the fear of not being academic when students’ interpretations are very subjective makes this approach unsupportable by me. Although I welcome students’ opinions concerning a text, I prefer other approaches like psychoanalyses, Marxism or formalism.” Teacher C is not a fervent advocate of reader response approach as a part of daily classroom pedagogy. More importantly, she seems to prefer three approaches namely: psychoanalytical criticism, which includes dealing with the author’s life, Marxism, which includes a close attention to the author’s socio-historical context, and formalism, which focuses on the formal, structural and technical matters. These approaches are, indeed, in contrast with the pedagogy of Rosenblatt, which impels students to make a close reading of the text rather than divagating from it to other matters, which are peripheral.

On the basis of the teachers’ questionnaire, one might venture to say that teacher A, to some extent, endorses a transactional classroom philosophy. For him three main factors preclude the application of this approach. First, the problem of large classes, which imposes a traditional way of teaching. Second, people’s negative attitudes towards literature and its irrelevance to their real life. Third, the insufficiency of the time allotted to the literature module in the 1st and 2nd year. Because of the overall conditions, theory and practice constitute an ill-matched pair. Teachers B and C are less faithful to such an approach. Though some of their responses reverberate with reader response approach, their teaching practices do not dovetail with it.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The following suggestions are likely to help implement or incorporate a transactional approach and thus to enhance learner-centeredness.

1-To engage learners in the literature class, the teacher must encourage them to make use of their schemata and personal experience. He must be a facilitator of the reader-text transaction by familiarizing students with the aesthetic mode of reading texts and asking questions, something
The literary text wants readers, not readings:

1. The teacher should also transact with the text and show students that the text is a “living-through”.

2. The syllabus must be based on a deep respect for the students’ views and their role as meaning-makers. By respecting students’ views on the text, the latter are likely to infuse the text with multiple shades of meaning. When given an interpretation, which differs from his own or which is entirely invalid, the teacher should never say it is wrong. He should try, instead, to encourage, guide and show them how to develop their own interpretation. Each student is unique and has a different personal viewpoint which is not necessarily wrong.

3. To create a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom, group work is suggested. The teacher might divide the group into small groups to make them express their feelings and views freely and compare between different interpretations. Each student, in this case, will vie for a more plausible interpretation. He will argue in order to vindicate the verity of his own viewpoint. So, group work is likely to sharpen students’ critical skills and to lead them towards more valid interpretations.

4. Teachers must select literary works, which can be fitted into the students’ context. These texts must capture their interests in order to stimulate them and foster their motivation. Literature will fail to provide aesthetic experience if it is totally alien and detached from the students’ main preoccupations, emotions, needs and interests. The personal factor must be a main concern to insure a successful curriculum.

5. Teachers’ questions must be as open-ended as possible to provoke discussion and interaction. Under the reign of the LMD system, particularly, teachers, not just of literature, should avoid the multiple choice questions in order to lessen the detrimental effects of the compensation system, which encourages passivity and laziness. We suggest an urgent return for the old method of grading, which is still used only in the ENS schools.

6. The administration should take into account the problem of large classes. This problem is a formidable obstacle, which precludes the implementation of a transactional approach to reading. It is likely to make students more remote and detached from the teaching-learning process. Teachers, in turn, will opt for the traditional lecture method to combat this problem.

7. Some types of activities which make the implementation of transaction theory possible are:

   A. The teacher must encourage students to write literary response journals (reading journals) In the reading process, students pause to jot down their thoughts, emotions and understandings freely on a sheet of paper. These reading journals might engender many advantages. First, they make students reflect on their own learning. Second, they promote autonomous learning, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. Third, journals create teacher-students and student-student interaction beyond the classroom context.

   B. Teachers can encourage students to think aloud orally.

   C. Teachers might ask their students to annotate their response while reading the literary text. Recording their reading experiences through annotations helps students remember them later.

8. It would be very interesting to ask students to write interpretative essays (paragraphs), which are argumentative. In other words, essays (paragraphs) on topics, which raise debates and on which students would disagree. This will prompt them to make herculean intellectual efforts to defend their stance.
9-Literature must be given a larger amount of time, and it should be accorded a more pivotal place in the curriculum.

10-Since the teacher’s philosophy of teaching and his teaching method has a great impact on the students’ learning attitudes, teachers must be trained on Rosenblatt’s transaction theory.

11-At the end, we suggest the use of this approach in a longitudinal study.

Conclusion

To round off, teachers’ assumptions and beliefs about the students’ role must be compatible with the pedagogy of the learner-centered approach in which the student is the fulcrum around which the teaching-learning process turns. Indeed, Learner-centered approach and transaction theory can be validly combined by giving students voice to express their personal responses to the text, which include their personal experience and socio-cultural background. In its emphasis on the reader and its denial of meaning as firmly rooted in the text, transaction theory, very much like the communicative approach, gives the students a more active and productive role. Thus, transactional approach to reading literature is likely to enlarge the contribution of literature to communicative language teaching and help in the achievement of its goals. Of utmost importance, it will help develop process-oriented learning.

If applied in the Algerian universities, Rosenblatt’s approach might be an incentive for students to read frequently and voluntarily. It is likely to fill students’ hearts with a never-ending love and passion for literature. This theory will end spoon-feeding and parasitic learning and promote their critical thinking, self-feeding and autonomous learning. Students’ underlying emotional and socio-cultural preoccupations must be an integral part of any course or syllabus design to ensure and foster positive attitudes, to rise motivation, and above all, to make the learning situation efficient and interesting as well. Indeed, transactional theory would constitute great gains if applied in the literature class.
References


**Appendix 1**

**Questionnaire**

Dear students, you are kindly invited to complete this questionnaire about your attitudes towards reading literary texts. We would like to assure you that your answers will be anonymous and that they will be used just for research purposes. Please, if you have any question, feel free to ask your teacher.

**Part One**

1-Do you find literature a very interesting subject matter?  
   Yes ☐ No ☐

2- What do you think is the importance of literary texts?  
   A- Literary texts help me build up my vocabulary and improve my English.  
   B- Literary texts are related to my personal life and real life in general.  
   C- Literary texts help me get new information about history the author’s life  
   D- Literary texts help me think critically.

3-Do you find the literary texts of the literature course interesting?  
   Yes ☐ No ☐

4-Does reading literary texts have any effect on your feelings and emotions?  
   Yes ☐ No ☐

5-Do you often read the literary texts included in the course of literature before class?  
   Yes ☐ No ☐

6-Do you often read literary texts outside the classroom without being asked by the teacher?  
   Yes ☐ No ☐
7-What are the ways that you use in order to understand the literary text’s meaning before class?

a- I read the text attentively and patiently before class.

b- I read the York notes (Cliff’s Notes) or others’ critical views about the text.

c- I just wait for the teacher’s interpretation.

d- First, I read others’ critical views, then, I read the text.

8- In the literature class, do you often express your emotional and intellectual responses to the texts freely?

Yes ☐ No ☐

9- Do you have confidence in your ability to interpret the literary text alone?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10- Do you like the exam questions to be in the form of an essay (paragraph) or in the form of questions that must be answered in short statement? Justify

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Part Two

11- Does your teacher use the lecture method instead of encouraging students’ participation in the class?

Yes ☐ No ☐

12- What kind of questions do you get in the literature exam?

A- multiple choice questions.

B- questions about factual information that must be answered in short statements.

C- An essay (paragraph), which elicits your intellectual and emotional responses.

If none of these options, please state the right one.
Appendix 2

Questionnaire

Dear teachers, you are kindly invited to complete this questionnaire about your teaching beliefs and practices in the literature class. The questionnaire requires answers, which really reflect your teaching attitudes and methods. Your responses are very pivotal and important for our research paper.

1- Is your classroom teacher-centered or student-centered? How would you prefer it to be?

2- In the literature class, do you take into account the students’ personal life and their socio-cultural context in the interpretation of the literary text? Justify

3- What do you do in order to motivate your students?

4- Do your students read the literary texts included in the course of literature? Justify

5- Do you think that the LMD system might help students develop a positive attitude towards literature and promote their interest in this subject matter? Justify

6- Do you think that it is possible to implement a reader-response approach to literature in your literature class? How would you accomplish that?
The Appropriateness in Advice-Giving From a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

This cross-cultural study investigates the differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness in advice giving in English between American English native speakers (AEL1) and Jordanian learners of English as a foreign language (JEFL). Data were collected using an adopted version of a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) by Hinkel (1997). The questionnaire consists of eight situations that required advice giving or opting out to a peer acquaintance (equal status) and an instructor (higher status). Each situation was accompanied by three MC selections in random order: direct advice, hedge advice, and indirect comments. The fourth selection was an explicit choice for opting out that remained constant for all selections. Results revealed that both groups have the same perception of the social distance in the situations involving peer acquaintance and instructor. They, however, differed in the types of advice they showed as the appropriate choice. JEFL participants considered direct advice or hedge advice as appropriate option to be used with peer acquaintance and with instructors where in American culture the AEL1 participants found these strategies as least likely appropriate. The paper suggests EFL programs that promote awareness for JEFL on various appropriate conversational strategies in English. The results are expected to be useful information in cross-cultural comparison studies and other related areas.

Keywords: Speech act, Giving-Advice, Individualism and Collectivism.
Introduction

Over the past three decades, researches of cross-cultural speech acts have shown that L2 learners’ communicative competence greatly relies on their cultural competence. For example, Bentahila and Davies (1989) differentiated between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of behaviour associated with the target language culture. Thus, L2 learners who have considerable grammatical competence or lexical knowledge of the target language but have a lack of sociocultural awareness may encounter problems of communication with native speakers (NS) due to their lack of the pragmatic knowledge of the target language culture, that is, when to use appropriate linguistic forms (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Thomas, 1983; Hinkel, 1997; Matsumura, 2001). According to Kasper (1992), the concept of pragmatic is dealt with the ability to interact and communicate with speakers of other languages and cultures through language forms appropriate to specific contexts. Otherwise, the possibility of communication breakdowns is most likely to occur. Such communication breakdowns come into play when NNSs rely on their pragmatic knowledge of appropriate L1 speech acts and negatively transfer it to their L2 and then pragmatic failure occurs (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Hinkel, 1997; Matsumura, 2001; Bordería-García, 2006). Thomas (1983) considers these failures to be more serious than grammatical or lexical deficiency because it may be understood to be rudeness or unfriendliness that may affect the speakers’ relationships.

Studies examining pragmatic awareness have focused on various speech acts such as refusal (Beebe et al., 1990; Al Issa, 2003), apology (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006), and request (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Al-Momani, 2009). Those studies have contributed to revealing the differences between NSs and NNSs and to better understanding of the use of appropriate linguistic forms in different languages and cultures and further to avoiding communication breakdowns. However, not many studies were done on the speech act of advice (Hinkel, 1994, 1997; Matsumura, 2001; Bordería-García, 2006; Chun, 2009), and in Jordanian context, to the researchers’ best knowledge, there has been no investigation of giving advice conducted on Jordanian EFL learners. Therefore, it would be useful to examine how the speech act of giving advice is perceived in English by Jordanian EFL learners at University Kebangsaan Malaysia (henceforth, UKM) that would contribute in cross-cultural comparison studies. In other words, this study aims to investigate cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness of giving advice in English between American English native speakers and Jordanian EFL learners at UKM and to provide interpretations of the differences mainly in terms of the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism. The reason for selecting English in the present study refers to the fact that English is the medium of instruction for Jordanian EFL learners in Malaysia and is also a language that is frequently needed in their everyday interaction. Thus, it would be important to pay attention to pragmatic competence of the Jordanian EFL learners rather than their grammatical competence.

The Speech Act of Advice

The speech act of giving advice has not been studied extensively with the exception of a few scholars (Bordería-García, 2006; Chun, 2009). As a result very few definitions of what giving advice entails are available. The following two seem to be appropriate for this research; first by Searle (1969) who stated that giving advice is a kind of speech act which the speaker believes
will benefit the hearer. He further demonstrates that by giving advice, the speaker is doing the hearer a favour because it is not clear to both of them that the hearer will do the act without the advice being given. Searle distinguished between advice and request as advising is more like telling on what is the best for his/her rather than what s/he should do. Second, Brown and Levinson (1987) described giving advice as an “intrinsically face threatening act” (p. 65), where the speaker indicates that s/he does not mean to avoid obstructing the hearer’s freedom of action. However, Brown and Levinson observe that the degree to which advice is a face-threatening act differs among cultures based on the measure of power which the hearer has over the speaker, the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, and the politeness strategies considered appropriate in a particular culture. Matsumoto (1994) on the other hand, points out that in collectivist cultures like Japanese; a face-threatening is not intended by an imposition on the hearer’s freedom of action but by inequality in the rank relation of the speaker and the hearer. With this respect, the speech act of giving advice may not be understood as a face-threat. Although the giving of advice can be perceived as rude by Americans native speakers, the giving of advice in Arabic is not only an expression of friendliness but also largely conveys benevolence and support (El-Sayed, 1990). Once again, this study focuses to investigate Jordanian EFL learners’ perceptions of the appropriateness of giving advice in English in terms of the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism.

Related Studies on Advice-Giving

Many researchers have agreed that NNSs’ perceptions of different kinds of speech act varied from those of NSs of English, and although there are great number established studies on speech acts (Watts, 2003), the number is seemingly very small for the speech act of giving advice (Nydell, 1987; El-Sayed, 1990; Hinkel, 1994, 1997; Matsumura, 2001; Bordería-García, 2006; Chun, 2009). Moreover, after an exhausting and long journey of investigation in Jordanian, Malaysian and US libraries and academic institutions, the researchers found no study that examined the differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness of giving advice in English between American English native speakers and Jordanian EFL learners. Thus, such investigation would be useful to understand the cross-cultural features of both Jordanian and American speech communities with regards to the speech act of giving advice. In her comparative study, Hinkel (1994) investigated cross-cultural differences between native English speakers (NS) and nonnative English speakers’ (NNS) perceptions of appropriateness of giving advice. The participants of this study were 172 NNSs included Chinese (84), Japanese (33), Korean (16), Indonesian (16), Arabic (13), and Spanish (10) participants. On the other hand, the NSs included of (31) of American English participants. Results revealed that NNSs group provided advice to the superior and the peer acquaintance noticeably more frequently than the NSs. In addition, responses provided by speakers of Spanish and Arabic were most nearly like NSs and differed from those of other NNSs groups. In descending order, they were followed by the speakers of Indonesian, Chinese, and Japanese; speakers of Korean deviated the most from the responses of NSs (Hinkel, 1994). In addition, she elaborated that the notion of giving advice may be viewed in collectivist cultures as “an expression of friendliness and interest, i.e. a conversational routine and/or a rapport-building activity, which is, nonetheless, considered inappropriate in some English-speaking cultures” (pp. 84-85), which are typically placed as individualist cultures. Finally, Hinkel notes that NNSs rely on their L1 perceptions of
conversational appropriateness and politeness in performing their L2 speech act of giving advice. She concluded that NNSs need to be taught pragmatically appropriate topics and formulae in the L2. Hinkel’s study is important as it provides a significant contribution with regard to the scenarios that she designed in order to elicit giving advice responses. Over the last decade, these scenarios have been widely adapted by other researchers examining the speech act of advice and the current research is a new addition to the corpus. The findings would contribute significantly toward further cross-linguistics and cross-cultural discourses.

In another study dealing with the appropriateness of advice, Hinkel (1997) investigated cross-cultural differences of advice giving in terms of production collected by discourse completion test (DCT) and perception collected by Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). The participants of this study were equally divided by gender into two groups of forty Taiwanese Chinese and forty American native speakers of English. Findings revealed that when responding to the MCQ, NNSs chose substantially more options with either direct or hedged advice than did NSs, which is in line with theoretical assumptions. In response to DCTs, however, NSs preferred direct and hedged advice significantly more than did NNSs. According to her, DCTs may not always be the best elicitation instrument for L1 and L2 data. Another important finding, which is related to the present study, Hinkel found that one of the essential differences between the Chinese concept of collective self and Anglo-American individualism lies in the Confucian and Taoist precept of interdependence with others which is in contrast with cultural values emphasizing personal autonomy. Thus, this study is important because it is the first of its kind that compared two data collection instruments, DCT and MCQ, to elicit participants’ perception in the framework of advice-giving studies.

In the Japanese context, Matsumura (2001) investigated the perceptions of social status in giving advice by two groups of Japanese ESL and EFL students. The EFL group was studying at a university in Kyoto, Japan, and the ESL group was studying at a university in Vancouver, Canada, for 8 months in an exchange program. Data were collected using a 12-item MCQ to elicit the participants’ perception of the appropriateness of giving advice. The primary focus of this study was to investigate how both groups of Japanese students developed pragmatic competence in their giving advice in English, and therefore to compare their approximation of preferences for advice type to native speakers preferences. Results revealed that at the study’s initial stage the ESL group appeared lower in pragmatic performance than the former but then surpassed them at the end of the study period. Such finding suggests that the students who lived and studied abroad had a better perception of social status in giving advice. This study is significant because it provides an important longitudinal analysis of how the pragmatic competence on giving advice developed over time. However, the researcher did not specify what caused such significant development of pragmatic competence in terms of cultural differences between Canada and Japan. There is also an issue of inadequacy of using just one instrument to make a strong conclusive claim of the Japanese perceptions on the appropriateness of giving advice (Rose & Ono, 1995).

In her dissertation, Bordería-García (2006) investigated cross-cultural differences in the productions and perceptions of advice giving. The data were obtained via role-plays (productions) and a written questionnaire in the form of metapragmatic judgment task (perceptions). The participants of this study included students of Spanish as a foreign language at
three proficiency levels, and their data were compared with native speakers of Spanish from Spain and North American English Speakers. The primary aim of this study was to examine if the students of Spanish as a foreign language at three proficiency levels develop the appropriate pragmatic knowledge needed to interpret and give advice. The findings showed no significant difference in the perceptions of appropriateness of non-conventionally indirect, conventionally indirect, and direct forms of advice by the native speakers of Spanish and the native English. However, they differed in the oral productions with the Spanish speakers showing a significant preference on giving direct advices. The main differences between the learners and the NS of Spanish were in the perception and usage of the non-conventionally direct strategies, which seems to be due to transfer from learners’ native language, i.e., English. It was also found that in a collectivist culture like Spanish, family, physical appearance and well-being, and job-related topics are not seen as private matters. Thus, when speakers of Spanish offer advice on what they perceive to be non-private topics, in L2 they may threaten the hearer’s face without being aware of the impact to the hearers (Condon, 1987).

This study is important because it is one of a very small number of speech act studies that examined the concept of pragmatic transfer in the framework of advice. This study, however, has some limitations. For example, similar to Matsumura’s (2001) study, this study used only one method for the study of perception as well as only six strategies for giving advice were investigated. Hence, perception can be examined using interviews or naturally occurring data. Regarding the participants, those who served as native speakers of Spanish came from only one region of Spain (the east) and they may not be representative of how everyone in Spain talk.

More recently, Chun (2009) investigated cross-cultural differences in the speech act of giving advice by Korean speakers and Canadian English speakers. This study aims to provide interpretations of the differences primarily in terms of the four cultural value-orientations of horizontal individualism (H-IND), vertical individualism (V-IND), horizontal collectivism (H-COL), and vertical collectivism (V-COL). The participants of this study included 35 Korean students and 35 Canadian students with both males and females. Data were collected using a 2-part questionnaire. Part one aims to elicit politeness strategies in giving advice, whereas part two consists of twelve items to assess other cultural value-orientations. Results revealed that there was a significant difference between Canadian and Korean students in terms of the social distance. Canadian students were less dependent on social distance than Korean students. Canadian students tended to give advice significantly less frequently to peers and superiors than did Korean students. This particular difference can be attributable to the respective cultural value-orientations. Another important finding is that Koreans, as vertical collectivistic society, likely show vertical integration emphasizing the sense of propriety and respect for social hierarchy rather than horizontal integration emphasizing interdependence and collective duty. In contrast, Canadians as vertical individualistic society lack both horizontal and vertical integration. Vertical individualists tend to predispose themselves toward individual rights and autonomy. Thus, this study is important as it extended the conventional framework of the existing two cultural types of individualism (IND) and collectivism (COL).

In Arabic context, El-Sayed (1990) and Nydell (1987) elaborated that the speech act of giving advice is perceived as a rapport-building speech act that is common in the Arabic culture and serves as a means of establishing group belonging, which is a primary aspect of collectivist
cultures. According to El-Sayed (1990), this particular speech act is perceived as an expression of friendliness and also greatly conveys benevolence and support in Arabic culture. Nydell (1987) notes that topics that are considered private are subject to cultural interpretation and issues such as children, health, physical comfort and well-being, financial matters, professional qualifications, and personal contentment are openly discussed. Hence, refusing advice on what Americans would consider private matters can be met with a sense of bewilderment and rejection in Arab culture. These studies are important because they are the only two studies that paid attention to the speech act of advice in Arabic context. However, no explanations were presented with regard to the data collection or how the data were transcribed.

To sum up, it can be seen that the appropriateness of giving advice may vary from culture to culture. In collectivist cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Arabs giving direct advice such as “you should stop smoking, you are heavy smoker” often reflect the speaker's sincere concern for the welfare of the hearer. In contrast, in individualist cultures such as in the USA, people tend to perceive the same form of advice as an invasion of their privacy. It also can be seen from the literature that this speech act has not been studied adequately in Arabic culture. Specifically, to the researchers’ best knowledge, there has been no investigation of giving advice conducted on Jordanian EFL learners. Therefore, it would be useful to examine how the speech act of giving advice is perceived in English by Jordanian EFL learners at UKM that would contribute in cross-cultural comparisons. This will be the gap where the contribution will be made by this study.

The Study

This study aims to investigate cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness of giving advice in English between American English native speakers and Jordanian EFL learners. It also aims to provide interpretations of these salient differences between the two groups. It is mainly based on the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism. This cultural dimension is the most broadly adopted one in investigating the differences and the similarities in cross-cultural communication studies. In this paper, collectivism is characterized by individual subordination of personal goals to the goals of the collective group while individualism is characterized by the subordination of a group’s goals to an individual’s own goals. A fundamental conviction of people in collectivist cultures is that the smallest unit of survival is the collective power. On the other hand, in individualist cultures the smallest unit of survival is the individuals themselves (Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988), because the self is autonomous and separated from the group, while in collectivistic cultures the self is never defined by an autonomous self but by a group of others (Lyuh, 1992). In addition, Triandis et al. (1988) explain that people in individualistic cultures show positive attitudes toward horizontal relationships and are uneasy about people in authority. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures show positive attitudes toward vertical relationships and accept differences in power.
Jordan typically is classified as a collectivistic culture, while the USA is typically classified as an individualistic culture. Thus these emerging two research questions that initiated this study:

1. What are the differences in the contextual and cultural dimensions between Jordanian EFL learners and American English native speakers in the perceptions of the speech act of giving advice?

2. Why are there differences in the speakers’ perceptions of the speech act of giving advice between Jordanian EFL learners and American native speakers of English in terms of contextual and cultural dimensions?

Methodology

Participants

The participants to the present study were twenty Jordanian EFL learners (JEFL) and twenty American English native speakers (AEL1). The participants of the latter group were chosen among visitors visiting Malaysia. This group was first composed of 32 speakers who were ethnically diverse. Of the 32 participants, 12 speakers were not AEL1 (5 were speakers of Germany, 3 Italy, 2 British, and 2 Australian) and were therefore excluded. The remaining AEL1 consist of 20 male speakers whose ages ranged from 25-45 years old. On the other hand, the Jordanian participants were all graduate students, both Masters and PhD, pursuing studies in both pure sciences and applied sciences at UKM’s main campus located in Bandar Baru Bangi, a town in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. They also are relatively homogeneous in terms of their cultural background (Jordanian Arabs of northern region of Jordan) and academic/linguistic experiences (25- to 35-year old graduates, both master and PhD, pursuing studies in both pure science and applied science fields at UKM). All 38 JEFL of northern region of Jordan who are pursuing studies in both pure science and applied science fields at UKM all participated in the study. However, responses of only 20 male students whose ages ranged from 25-35 were randomly chosen in order to match the number and sex ratio of the American participants. In addition, all of them had never travelled to any English speaking countries other than to and within Malaysia. In another research project, the researchers observed the participants of the present study for around five months. Thus, based on the researchers’ personal contact with them, the researchers judge the participants to represent intermediate to high-intermediate English proficiency.

Instrument and Procedure

The issue of how data are collected is one of the main concerns in cross-cultural researches. Trosborg (1995) stressed that data collection in an ethnographic procedure (i.e. naturally occurring data) is the ultimate goal in most cross-cultural researches. This data collection method is considered to be the most reliable data source in speech act research because it reflects what speakers actually say rather than what they think they will say in a given speech situation (Wolfson, 1986; Bardovi-Harlig& Hartford, 1993). However, the contextual variables (e.g., gender, age, status) are difficult to be controlled and very time consuming. Another limitation is that the occurrence of some speech acts cannot be predicted and therefore this method might not
yield enough instances of a particular speech act. Accordingly, collecting ethnographic data seem to be an unlikely option for cross-cultural speech act researches.

As a result, due to the limitations of those of ethnographic procedures, the present study adopted a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) established by Hinkel (1997) as the data collection procedure (see Appendix). In their distinction between DCT and MCQ, Kasper and Dahl (1991) pointed out that the difference between DCT and MCQ data lies in the type of elicited responses, i.e. MCQ elicits ‘perceptions of alternative speech act realization’, while DCT is classified to constrained production instrument. According to Hinkel (1994), MCQ has been proven to be a more effective measure of subjects’ judgments of appropriateness as compared to DCT and open-ended instruments. For these reasons, an adopted version of Hinkel’s (1997) MCQ was chosen to investigate the cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness of giving advice in English between American English native speakers and Jordanian EFL learners.

The characters were briefly described in the questionnaire situations: a social superior i.e. a college instructor with whom the participants were familiar in a professional capacity only, and a peer acquaintance. The questionnaire consists of eight situations that required giving advice or opting out: four involved statements addressed to the social superior and four to the peer acquaintance. Each situation was accompanied by three MC selections in random order: (1) direct advice involving the model “should,” (2) hedged advice using “need to” or other softeners or hedging advices, lexical hedging (“may be, I think”), or questions, and (3) indirect comment including no advice or suggestions. The fourth selection was an explicit choice for opting out that remained constant for all selection. Examples of direct advice, hedge advice, and indirect comments are illustrated in (1) to (3), respectively:

1. You shouldn’t order the hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy.
2. May be it’s not a good idea to order a hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy.
3. I had a hamburger here before, and it was really greasy.

Regarding the JEFL group, the researchers met the participants and administrate the questionnaires at five computer laboratories from 3 faculties/institutes, namely the Faculty of Information Science and Technology, the Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology Studies, and the Institute of Mathematical Science Studies. The details of the administration are as the following:

1. The researchers explain the tasks in detail to the participants.
2. Participants were then asked to read each situation and react to it by trying to place themselves in the situations presented. They were asked to choose the statement (or question) that they think would be the most appropriate to say in the situation.

For the AEL1 group, the researchers met them at different locations in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, such as in hotels, guest houses, and public parks. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 10 minutes. Over the period of five weeks, the researchers completed their data collection. Data were analysed based on Hinkel’s (1997) classification of giving advice strategies. Once again, three major levels of directness for giving advice can be
identified cross-culturally on theoretical grounds: (1) direct advice involving the model “should,” (2) hedge advice using “need to” or other softeners or hedging advices, lexical hedging (“may be, I think”), or questions, and (3) indirect comment including no advice or suggestions. Finally, the data were analyzed based on the frequency and percentage of each MC selection in each situation. In other words, the participants’ choices of the MC responses were tallied and converted to percentages (see Table 1 below).

Results and Discussion

Research question one was to see if there are differences in the perceptions on giving advice between Jordanian EFL learners and American English native speakers. As illustrated in Table 1 below, Jordanian EFL learners selected the options of direct advice more frequently than AEL1 did in two out of four situations with peer acquaintance. Specifically, Jordanian EFL learners were more direct in the situations of Unreliable car and Repair shop situations. However, AEL1 chose direct advice option more frequently than JEFL did in the Library situation. In the Academic course setting, both groups JEFL and AEL1 selected the option of direct advice in the same frequency (n=3). Although there were differences in the options of selecting direct advice between JEFL and AEL1, these differences seemed to be insignificant. For example, 3 out of 20 of JEFL selected the option of direct advice in the Library situation, while 4 out of 20 of AEL1 chose the direct advice option in the same situation.

On the other hand, the differences between JEFL and AEL1 were significant in the choice of hedging advice options, with the JEFL choosing such options more frequently than AEL1 did. This is in consistent with findings from Hinkel (1997) where Chinese selecting such options markedly more frequently than NSs of American English. For example, 25 out of 40 of Chinese participants selected the option of hedge advice in the Library situation, while 6 out of 40 of NSs of American English chose the hedge advice option in the same situation.

The majority of JEFL chose hedge advice option in all situations with peer acquaintance. For example, 12 out of 20 of JEFL selected hedge advice in the Repair shop situation (i.e. It’s better to take your car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer), while 6 out of 20 of AEL1 chose hedge advice in the same situation. In contrast, the AEL1 selected indirect comment options more frequently than JEFL did. For example, 12 out of 20 of AEL1 selected indirect comment in the Repair shop situation (i.e. I usually take my car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer), while 6 out of 20 of JEFL chose indirect comment in the same situation.

With regard to Instructor’s Situations, AEL1 participants’ frequency choices were similar to those with Peer Acquaintance i.e., the majority of them tended to choose indirect comments or to opt out altogether. JEFL participants however, preferred to give direct advice such as in Illness situation, and in the case of the situations for the Library, the Bookstore, and the Restaurant, they did it through hedged advice more frequently (35%, 25%, 35%, respectively) Interestingly, these findings are consistent with Hinkel (1994, 1997) and Matsumura (2001) where Hinkel (1997) for example, found that most of the Chinese participants selected direct advice in the Illness situation, followed by those who chose hedge advice.
Table 1: MCQ Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Hedge</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer acquaintance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Unreliable car</td>
<td>JEFL (25) 5</td>
<td>JEFL (45) 9</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
<td>JEFL (10) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
<td>AEL1 (20) 4</td>
<td>AEL1 (50) 10</td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic course</td>
<td>JEFL (15) 3</td>
<td>JEFL (50) 10</td>
<td>JEFL (30) 6</td>
<td>JEFL (5) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
<td>AEL1 (10) 2</td>
<td>AEL1 (70) 14</td>
<td>AEL1 (5) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Repair shop</td>
<td>JEFL (10) 2</td>
<td>JEFL (60) 12</td>
<td>JEFL (30) 6</td>
<td>JEFL (0) 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (5) 1</td>
<td>AEL1 (30) 6</td>
<td>AEL1 (60) 12</td>
<td>AEL1 (5) 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Library</td>
<td>JEFL (15) 3</td>
<td>JEFL (55) 11</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
<td>JEFL (10) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (20) 4</td>
<td>AEL1 (20) 4</td>
<td>AEL1 (35) 7</td>
<td>AEL1 (25) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Library</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
<td>JEFL (35) 7</td>
<td>JEFL (25) 5</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
<td>AEL1 (10) 2</td>
<td>AEL1 (35) 7</td>
<td>AEL1 (40) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Illness</td>
<td>JEFL (40) 8</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
<td>JEFL (25) 5</td>
<td>JEFL (15) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (10) 2</td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
<td>AEL1 (50) 10</td>
<td>AEL1 (25) 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bookstore</td>
<td>JEFL (20) 4</td>
<td>JEFL (25) 5</td>
<td>JEFL (40) 8</td>
<td>JEFL (15) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (10) 2</td>
<td>AEL1 (10) 2</td>
<td>AEL1 (65) 13</td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Restaurant</td>
<td>JEFL (15) 3</td>
<td>JEFL (35) 7</td>
<td>JEFL (40) 8</td>
<td>JEFL (10) 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AEL1 (5) 1</td>
<td>AEL1 (15) 3</td>
<td>AEL1 (60) 12</td>
<td>AEL1 (20) 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: frequency count is listed in each cell, with percentages provided in brackets.

Generally speaking, both JEFL and AEL1 participants perceived the social distance in the situations with peer acquaintance (equal status) and instructor (higher status) very similarly. They, however, differed in the types of advice they showed as the appropriate choice. This is in accordance with findings from Hinkel (1994) where NSs and NNSs very similarly perceived the social distance in situations with the superior and a peer. However, both NSs and NNSs substantial differences in the patterns of advice they viewed as the best choice: NNSs selected advice to the superior and the peer with a frequency and on topics which would not be considered appropriate in the Anglo-American culture. In other words, JEFL considered the direct advice or hedge advice to be an appropriate option significantly more frequent than AEL1 did with a peer acquaintance or an instructor, which would not be considered to be appropriate in the American culture. Hence, JEFL viewed giving advice as a matter of friendliness, rapport-building, concern, sincere interest, and solidarity, while AEL1 perceived advice as an FTA.

The second research question asked for the reasons of such differences in the speakers’ perceptions on giving advice between Jordanian EFL learners and American English native speakers in terms of contextual and cultural factors. As the JEFL were all Muslims, they perceived giving advice as an Islamic obligation. Regardless of what people may think of someone, every Muslim ought to be concerned about giving advice in their daily life and should not think about people’s reaction, whether they will condemn or praise them later. Thus, JEFL viewed giving advice as a matter of friendliness, rapport-building, concern, sincere interest, and solidarity which all represent the nature of the collectivist cultures. In contrast, AEL1 perceived
it as an invasion of their privacy and therefore as a FTA which represents the nature of the individualism’s culture. This is in consistent with other studies conducted by El-Sayed (1990) and others who have found that giving advice is perceived as an expression of friendliness and also greatly conveys benevolence and support in the Arabic culture. In addition, Nydell (1987) notes that topics that are considered private are subject to cultural interpretation and issues such as children, health, financial matters, professional qualifications, and personal contentment are openly discussed. Thus, refusing advice on what Americans would consider private matters can be met with a sense of bewilderment and rejection by JEFL.

Another reason is that in L2 situations, NNSs, as is the case with JEFL offer advice with diverse goal-orientations, i.e. for diverse means-end relationships than NSs (Goody, 1978, as cited in Hinkel, 1994). Finally, such differences would refer to the fact that JEFL rely on their pragmatic knowledge of appropriate L1 (Arabic) speech acts and negatively transfer it to their L2 (English). This would also refer to the fact that JEFL are facing lack of access to appropriate L2 communicative and solidarity strategies. According to Rabab'ah (2005), the only way to learn English in Jordan is through formal instruction where most of the language instructors are native speakers of Arabic. Consequently, there is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language, where it is only possible when students encounter native speakers of English who come to the country as tourists. This is also in consistent with the claim made by Blum-Kulka (1982, 1983) that NNSs make use of L1 and L2 knowledge of rules of politeness inappropriately due to their lack of accessibility on interactional models for various linguistic politeness strategies in L2.

While advice giving is often considered as appropriate in Jordanian culture because of its manifestation of filial piety, rapport-building, concern, and collective duty; it is perceived to be inappropriate or rude in the American culture when not explicitly requested. With this in mind, it can be argued that the concept of politeness in Jordan culture could easily be interpreted as different from that in the American culture. Therefore, the universality of politeness claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is arguable with this respect. AEL1’s beliefs of individual rights and autonomy frequently perceive advice giving as invasion of privacy, whereas JEFL’s beliefs of collective duty tend to perceive it as a means to demonstrate warm interest in the in-group members’ well-being. Hence, the present study attributed such cross-cultural differences in advice giving to their respective cultural dimension: American individualism versus Jordan collectivism. This empirically grounded claim is a statement on the existence of variations in the concept of politeness across culture, despite some shared universal features from other speech acts.

Based on the findings of the present study, the researchers would like to reemphasize that school curricula in EFL contexts should focus not only on structures and vocabulary but also on the sociopragmatics aspects of the language. In other words, English teaching and learning in Jordan have to emphasize not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence. That is, if JEFL learners perceive giving advice as a means of friendliness, rapport-building, concern, sincere interest, and solidarity, therefore, within the context of target culture, it is most likely that this pragmatic communicative function can fail. Accordingly, EFL learners need to be taught the appropriate speech act routines and topics, associated with appropriateness and solidarity, so that their goal-oriented strategies can be effective (Hinkel, 1994). Specifically, Jordanian students who aspire to study in an English speaking country should be made aware of the language
transfer phenomena and to be cautious of the appropriateness of offering advices to the speakers of the target language, English, to avoid misinterpretation of intent and cultural understanding among the two groups of speakers.

**Conclusion and Further Research**

The findings of the present study showed how the speech act of giving advice is perceived in English in two culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Jordanians and Americans). The present study shows the fact that speech acts reflect the cultural norms and values that are possessed by the speakers of different cultural backgrounds, as different cultures are very likely to realize the speech acts quite differently. Such differences might cause misunderstanding or communication breakdowns when people from different cultural backgrounds come in contact with each other. Even though the researchers believe that this study has generally answered the research questions, further researches on giving advice by Jordanian EFL learners and Americans need to be investigated, i.e. investigating the production of giving advice and gender differences in giving advice. The generalizability of findings may be constrained by the following considerations:

a. Due to the small sample size and the fact that JEFL were all male graduate students, more research is required to support the current finding including researches involving female participants, larger/bigger participants, and different social groups. Because of the size of the current research, the generalizability of this study should not be assumed.

b. Participants who responded to MCQ, the instrument of the present study, cannot provide their intention or motivation when choosing an exact politeness strategy. They also cannot make an argument for their viewpoints on cultural value-orientations (Chun, 2009). Data collected in this study were only from written questionnaire items. Using data from actual discourse as an extended sequence of talk-exchange could make considerable contributions towards understanding the discourse patterns of giving advice. However, because the occurrence of some speech acts such as the speech act of giving advice cannot be predictable, using sequence of talk-exchange data might not yield enough instances of a particular speech act. In addition, MCQ serves as an instrument to elicit ‘perceptions of alternative speech act realization’, which is the scope of the present study.

c. Finally, the data was collected by using only one instrument limits the generalizability of the findings. Employing multi-method techniques for data elicitation and collection is the ideal, however, the samples for the study discussed here is enough to show some patterns of giving advice among the speakers of Jordanian Arabic and the American speakers. The methods used could further be reinforced in order to create corpus that are significant enough to formulate stronger claims for these early patterns that the study has found. Rose and Ono (1995) emphasized the need for a multi-method way as, “we should not expect a single data source to provide all the necessary insights into speech act usage” (p. 207).
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References


Appendix: An Adopted Version of Hinkle’s (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaires (MCQ)

Instructions

Eight situations are described in the items below. Following the description of a situation, you will find a multiple choice selection of three possible statements, A, B, and C. Choose the statement (or question) that you think would be the most appropriate to say in the situation. If you think it would be appropriate to say nothing, choose option D.

When you are responding to the questions, please keep in mind the following imaginary student: N H is a student in your department. You have similar interests in your majors. You have talked to N H several times in the department lounge.

Also, please keep in mind the following imaginary college instructor: There is an instructor in your department with whom you have similar professional interests. You have talked to this instructor several times in the department lounge.

Situations

1. You see the instructor working in the library very late in the evening. The instructor looks tired. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. You should not work so hard. It’s very late
   B. Why do you work so hard? It’s very late
   C. I’m going home soon. It is very late
   D. Nothing

2. N H’s car breaks down frequently. N H is planning on driving it to New York to see some relatives. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. I think it may be risky for you to take such a long trip in this car
   B. Taking such a long trip in this car may be risky
   C. You should not take this car for such a long trip. It may be risky
   D. Nothing

3. N H is considering taking a course. You have heard that the course is really difficult. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. I’ve heard that this course is really difficult
   B. It’s better not to take this course. I’ve heard it’s really difficult
   C. You shouldn’t take this course. I’ve heard that it’s really difficult
   D. Nothing

4. You and the instructor in a bookstore. The instructor is considering buying an expensive book. However, you think that another store may sell the book at a lower price. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?
A. You should buy the book at the other store. This store has high prices
B. This store has high prices
C. May be, it’s not a good idea to buy the book here. This store has high prices
D. Nothing

5. N H is thinking of taking a car to a repair shop downtown. However, you know of a shop on the corner where you have taken your car. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. I usually take my car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer
B. You should take your car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer
C. It’s better to take your car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer
D. Nothing

6. You and the instructor are in a restaurant. The instructor says something about ordering a hamburger. You ordered a hamburger in this restaurant before and, in your opinion, it was really greasy. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. You shouldn’t order the hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy
B. May be it’s not a good idea to order a hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy
C. I had a hamburger here before, and it was really greasy
D. Nothing

7. You see N H working in the library very late in the evening. N H looks tired. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. Why do you work so hard? It’s very late
B. You should not work so hard. It’s very late
C. I’m going home soon. It is very late
D. Nothing

8. You see the instructor working in the department office. The instructor looks ill and clearly doesn’t feel very well. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. You look like you don’t feel well
B. You should go home. You look like you don’t feel well
C. May be, it’s better to go home. You look like you don’t feel well
D. Nothing
Advertisements

Drawings as a Pathway to Productive Literacy

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Abstract

The role of children’s drawings as part of the writing process has attracted modest research interest, despite recent developments in multimodality studies. Early research tended to focus on drawings from a psycho-developmental perspective, where the child’s efforts at drawing is seen as a scaffold to help him/her move from the pre-writing stage to the writing stage. More recently, attention has shifted to the meaning-making potential in children’s drawings. Little else, however, has been ventured about the relationship between a child’s drawing and his/her writing. This paper focuses on the picture-stories created by two children at a kindergarten in Singapore as case studies. It attempts to show how their drawings serve as new information, capturing details that are missing in the text. In this light, children’s drawings serve as a portal to their make-believe worlds, and can be of immense help to teachers to both sieve out the intended meanings, and lead the children to fill in the missing details using language. The study argues that if writing difficulties are detected and remedied early enough through the use of children’s drawings, further difficulties in the children’s later schooling years can be avoided.

Keywords: early literacy, children’s drawings, writing, conferencing
Introduction

Studies on the literacy development of young learners are important in shedding light on various strategies to help children develop competencies in reading and writing (e.g., Gambrell, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007). Researchers and educators are acutely aware of both the importance of the early years of a child’s life to his/her cognitive and social development, and the unique challenges that early education presents. Young (2009) aptly notes that “not all children have the opportunity of developing emergent literacy understandings, and inequality of opportunity still exists” (p. 164).

This situation may be worsened by teachers not being aware of the struggles of their charges, and what they can do to address their needs. This paper takes the view that the timely intervention and mediated instruction of teachers are crucial to firm up the foundation of young learners, particularly the weaker ones, to help them avoid literacy problems in their later schooling years. This requires teachers to move beyond a myopic understanding of literacy—often seen as nothing more than one’s ability to read and write—to provide guidance on the appropriate use of language. Indeed, it has now become commonplace to speak of literacy in broad terms. Many scholars, like Gee (2007), regard literacy as one’s mastery over various discourses, and it is the very diversity of such discourses that has given rise to a plethora of terms such as scientific literacy, visual literacy, media literacy, multiliteracies, among others. These are not theoretical constructs, but competencies rooted in reality, since learning to read and write, and the very acts of reading and writing, do not take place in a vacuum. Parents and teachers of young children, for instance, often read to them, familiarizing them with the basic elements of the discourse of stories (e.g., characters, complication, resolution), and thus sowing the seeds for story literacy when the children themselves start experimenting with ideas and storylines in self-authored writing.

As children progress differently in literacy development, their self-authored pieces serve as valuable indicators of their development and, more importantly, the difficulties they might be facing. All too often, however, teachers pay attention to only the written language, focusing on errors related to spelling, grammar, or structure. Ironically, this emphasis on the written language may address only the superficial inadequacies, but not the deeper issues affecting children’s literacy development. As Sidelnick and Svoboda (2000) aptly note, “[t]eachers who value only conventional writing will stifle the exciting literary growth of young children” (p. 177). This is particularly relevant among pre-schoolers, since language is not the only resource available to them for communicating meaning on paper (Levin & Bus, 2003). From a developmental standpoint, Vygotsky (1978) observes:

Only one thing is certain—that written language of children develops in this fashion, shifting from drawings of things to drawings of words. The entire secret of teaching written language is to prepare and organize this natural transition appropriately … (p. 115)
That children take more easily to drawing than to writing is unsurprising. In writing, children need to rely on a symbolic (and therefore unnatural) writing system to express meanings. In drawings, by contrast, children have the world around them as a template; all they need to do is to simply copy or modify what they see around them. For this reason, weaker learners may not always find it easy to express their thoughts using language and so turn to drawings or drawing-like devices instead (Levin & Bus, 2003). Such drawings, that is to say, tend to contain elements of the story discourse that may be missing in the written language. We see here, then, that focusing on various errors in the written language may provide teachers with only an incomplete idea of what the child may be attempting to convey. More worryingly, teachers may also miss the opportunity to offer mediated instruction to help the child express in words the meanings that are captured in the drawings.

This paper proposes a strategy—revolving around children’s drawings—that teachers could use during conferencing sessions with their students to help them manage the difficulties with a greater measure of confidence. Focusing on the productive literacy (i.e., writing) of preschoolers, it offers a qualitative analysis of the stories authored by two children at a kindergarten in Singapore. Based on the framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), it attempts to show how the drawings in such stories serve as “new” information, capturing details that are missing in the text. In this light, children’s drawings serve as a portal to their make-believe worlds, and can be of immense help to teachers to both sieve out the intended meanings, and lead the children to fill in the missing details using language.

**Drawings and Early Literacy**

The role and significance of children’s drawings in the writing process have attracted only modest research interest over the years. Early research tended to focus on drawings from a psycho-developmental perspective (e.g., Clay, 1987; Eng, 1931; Rosenblatt & Winner, 1988), where the child’s efforts at drawing is seen as a scaffold to help him/her move from the pre-writing stage to the writing stage (e.g., Oken-Wright, 1998). More recently, attention has shifted to the meaning-making potential in children’s drawings (Anning & Ring, 2004; Cox, 2005; Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007; van Leeuwen, 1998). Cox (2005), for instance, drew attention to the content of the drawing, rather than its form, arguing that “we should explain children’s drawings in terms of what information they are trying to convey, rather than what they contain” (p. 123).

Studies exploring the connection between children’s drawings and their written products are even fewer in number. In these studies, the link between drawing and writing is at times indirect, obscuring how the former complements the latter in self-authored texts. Some of these studies, for instance, examined the effectiveness of using drawing as a planning activity for writing (e.g., Baghban, 2007; Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Norris, Mokhtari, & Reichard, 1998), while others analyzed children’s verbal descriptions about their drawings (Brooks, 2005; Coates, 2002; Kendrick & Kay, 2002; Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). A notable exception is the work
by van Leeuwen (1998), who analyzed the texts and drawings produced by eight- to ten-year-old children from three schools in England. Numbering 56 in all, the texts were produced after the children’s visit to a science museum; they were asked to both write about a science exhibit that attracted him/her, and illustrate that exhibit. Among the research questions that he raised in his study, the following is most relevant to our discussion: “How did the children integrate writing and drawing?” (van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 277).

Van Leeuwen’s analysis revealed several observations, two of which are of particular interest. First, he found that the vast majority of the children wrote about the exhibits before illustrating them. That is to say, in the production of the text, the act of writing tended to precede the act of drawing. This appears to imply an implicit acknowledgement among the children of the centrality of language in the communication of meaning.

Second, since most of the children wrote first and drew later, their written segments were frequently positioned at the top of the page, and the illustrations, at the bottom. While this might appear to be a self-evident outcome, van Leeuwen is careful to note that the top-bottom positioning of the elements reflects a deeper meaning, a polarization of two information values—the ideal vs. the real. Citing from his earlier work with Kress (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990, 1996), he suggests that “vertical, top-bottom structures […] present the top element as the generalized and/or idealized essence of the information, and the bottom element as contrasting with this by being more detailed and specific and/or more ‘down to earth,’ more oriented towards facts and practicalities” (van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 283).

van Leeuwen’s observation, of course, rests on the premise that the written segment and the drawing are positioned in top-bottom fashion. It is entirely possible, however, for these elements to be arranged in a left-right order instead. Indeed, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) agree that this arrangement is typical of magazines in cultures adopting a left-to-right reading path, where “[the] left pages contain mostly verbal text, with graphically salient photographs on the right” (p. 179). They posit that elements placed on the left typically represent given information and those on the right, new information. Given information here is regarded as that which the reader is assumed to know as a point of departure for the message of the larger work. New information, by contrast, represents that to which the reader must pay special attention.

We therefore have two typical positions for drawings in a multimodal text—at the bottom of the page, or on the left of a two-page spread. The top-bottom and left-right structures are summarized in Figure 1 below (adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 197):
If van Leeuwen (and Kress) is correct, this suggests that drawings, being either real or new, may therefore carry more factual or detailed information than what is expressed in the written segments. In the case of young learners, this helpfully points the way forward for teachers to use the children’s drawings to fill in details that are missing or glossed over in the writing. In line with the larger goal of (productive) literacy, this has the added benefit of helping children appreciate the norms of discourse—that the ideas in a written piece should be complete and coherent.

**Context of Study**

The children involved in the study were six year olds attending a kindergarten in Singapore. They were in the graduating class, meaning that they would be moving on to primary education in the following year. Kindergartens in the country—apart from foreign-system kindergartens for expatriates—use English as the medium of instruction. They are managed by private operators, and are therefore regarded as private schools (Pre-school Education, 2010). Hence, while kindergartens receive guidance on curriculum matters from the Singaporean Ministry of Education, they are generally free to design and implement their own curricula. The kindergarten involved in the study is managed by a community foundation, presently the largest kindergarten operator in the country.

The class under observation comprised 16 children, most of whom had moderate proficiency in English. At play, and even in the classroom, the children used colloquial Singaporean English, the grammar and vocabulary of which are heavily influenced by various Chinese dialects (primarily Hokkien) and Malay. The children had already spent two years at the kindergarten, and most of them could write simple texts with little or no help from the teacher.
The teacher was a degree-holder in her forties, with five years’ teaching experience at the preschool level. She was into her first year of teaching at the kindergarten, having moved there from another centre. As part of an enrichment program on creative writing instituted by the kindergarten, the teacher introduced a storybook project, where each child wrote an original story to be presented to his/her parents at a book launch at the end of the academic year. Over a three-month period (June to August 2009), the children spent about 40 minutes each week to write their stories. They were also encouraged to illustrate their stories. The writing sessions were accompanied by story-telling sessions by the teacher and speech-and-drama activities. The teacher reviewed the children’s work only at the end of the project in early September 2009, although she cheerfully attended to all the children’s queries during each writing session. By doing so, the teacher ensured that the storybooks were the children’s own work, an accurate reflection of their level of literacy.

Most of the children were excited about the project and came up with interesting ideas. As in many classes of this size though, there were a few children who found the writing task difficult (e.g., Perry & Winne, 2004). While they were able to articulate their thoughts eloquently in speech, they struggled to write them down. They tried to mask this by joking with their friends, playing with their stationery items or moving about the classroom frequently. During their time at school, these weaker learners tended to avoid writing because they lacked the confidence to produce proper sentences. Their being brought up in a relatively conservative Asian culture, which places emphasis on how one is evaluated by others, could be a further reason for their reluctance to write, even in the privacy of a small-group setting. The students, that is to say, had become convinced that since they were incapable of writing (well), they would simply avoid it as much as possible.

In such a scenario, the urgent task for any teacher is not to get such students to simply produce more sentences, but to change their mindset, and show them that they are not incapable of writing. Once this barrier is removed, the teacher can then start to work on other aspects of writing, such as spelling, word choice, and grammar. But a fundamental change in the child’s belief about his/her own abilities is crucial, and this is an issue to which we now turn in the following section.

Case Studies

The case studies involved a boy (‘Mark’) and a girl (‘Karen’), both ethnically Chinese. They were among the weaker students in the class.

Mark

Mark wrote about a sheet of magic paper that was able to fly and talk. He wanted his story to be different from the typical animal- and royalty-themed tales favored by his friends. At the start of the project, he considered various objects around the classroom before finally finding inspiration in the blank sheet of paper on which he was supposed to write the story.
Mark spent most of the weekly writing sessions talking about the magic paper and what it could do. While this might appear to be some form of a pre-writing planning activity for the story, the child was probably doing nothing more than sharing with his friends what his magic paper was capable of. In a way, he also wanted to establish how his story stood out from the rest—that something as common and seemingly unimportant as a sheet of paper could be endowed with such unnatural power.

Very little actual writing was done in each session; Mark averaged just three or four words each week, or a short sentence at the very most. At the end of the three-month period, Mark submitted the following as his story (corrections of all misspelled words are in superscript):

One day, a paper can fly. Because it is a magic paper and He can do arete! anything He can do lots and lots of things. He oso also can talk to Staneley Stanley and talk to Alex too.

What is immediately obvious from Mark’s writing is the number of spelling errors (e.g., “mag”, “arete”). As these errors are numerous, it is only natural for any teacher to focus on them and to get the child to correct them through any means possible. However, such an approach, while helpful, is likely to rectify only the superficial weaknesses in the written text; it may not address the larger problem holding the child back from writing more. As can be seen, Mark’s story is very short and thin on content.

In terms of sequence, Mark wrote out his story before illustrating it. The written segment was positioned on the left page of the storybook, and the drawing, on the right. According to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2006) framework, the drawing may therefore be regarded as containing new information, capturing details that are focal to the story. Mark’s drawing is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Mark’s drawing of two faces
In what sense is the drawing new information? Mark drew two smiling faces, representing Stanley and Alex, but there is no indication in the written text on the source or reason of this happiness, apart from the fact that the magic paper could talk to both Stanley and Alex. In a private conferencing session, the teacher then asked Mark to explain the drawing in his own words. This suited Mark well, as he found it considerably easier to talk about the drawing than to write about it. He told the teacher that the two characters in the story enjoyed talking to the magic paper; they treasured the sense of camaraderie that was built up through the simple act of talking. This notion of friendship was clearly important to Mark because, as it turned out, one of the characters was named after his best friend.

Mark conceded, reluctantly, that his story could be improved by mentioning the characters’ happiness in the writing. However, when the teacher asked him to add a few more lines to his story, he insisted that he was unable to do so, and preferred to leave the story as it was. The abstractness of the concept of happiness could be a reason for his reluctance to continue writing—writing about abstract concepts was very different from writing about a sheet of paper (which is tangible), or the acts of flying or talking (which are physical acts). This, coupled with the difficulties he encountered with spelling, rendered the idea of adding more details to his story a chore he would rather avoid.

The teacher, though, encouraged him with simple questions—“how do you think the boys felt?”, “do you think the boys liked the magic paper?”, etc. Mark answered these questions readily and confidently, almost without thinking. As his answers were in the form of short sentences, the teacher then suggested that he try writing those same sentences. This struck Mark as a good idea, as the sentences were short and relatively easy to manage, even for him. By the end of the conferencing session, he produced the following:

and don’ten Stanley like the magic paper. Alex also like the magic paper too.

The result surprised Mark, because barely fifteen minutes ago, he had been quite insistent that he would not be able to add anything further to his story. Through his drawing, the teacher had effectively showed him that he was not incapable of expressing abstract ideas in writing, or of extended writing in general.

After the conferencing session ended, Mark returned to his seat. However, instead of joking or playing with his friends as he usually did, he wrote a sentence below his drawing and proudly showed it to the teacher:
For Mark, this was a significant development. Here, for the first time, he wrote a sentence on his own, without any prompting; he did so because he wanted to, and not because his teacher told him so. Notice, too, that the sentence is error free, in stark contrast to the original sentences in the story. He had asked the teacher for the correct spelling of the word “magic” during the conferencing, and took care to spell the word correctly. This represented an important step forward for the child. His earlier reluctance had now given way to an eagerness to try out a sentence on his own.

From this account, we can now interpret the newness in Mark’s drawing in at least two ways. First, as we have seen, the information in the drawing is new in the sense that it captures complex ideas that are not evident in the writing. Tapping on this semiotic resource, then, offers teachers one way to help them better understand the rationale behind their students’ work. Second, we may also interpret the use of drawings as an alternative approach for teachers to offer feedback during private conferencing sessions with their students. Since the discussion during such sessions revolves around the children’s drawings in relation to their writing, the teacher’s feedback is specific and addresses particular areas of weaknesses in the writing. In this particular instance, the teacher formulated her questions to elicit simple answers from Mark, with the aim of getting him to write those answers as part of his story. Granted, Mark’s story is still short and full of spelling errors, but this approach goes some way to wean Mark off the self-defeating mentality that holds him back from writing more. As he becomes more confident and starts writing more, the teacher can then gradually target other problematic areas (e.g., spelling).

Karen

Karen was a quiet girl who kept mostly to herself. As she was not active in class, she was easy to miss. Like Mark, Karen also encountered problems in her writing, and managed only a few words in each in-class session. But whereas Mark was able to articulate his thoughts well in
speech, Karen was shy and rarely volunteered answers, making it difficult to understand her difficulties.

Karen chose to write about a girl, June, who met a boy at a dance. It started out promisingly as a love story, but Karen gradually lost interest in the writing and instead turned her attention to illustrating the little that she wrote. In terms of the layout of the storybook, the written segment was positioned on the left, and Karen’s drawing, on the right. Karen’s story is reproduced below:

One day June is going to the ballroom. She meet a boy.

We were walking

As compared to Mark’s story, Karen’s effort was a weak attempt at writing. Although she made only one spelling error and some minor grammatical slips (e.g., inconsistent tenses, use of the first-person “we” in reference to third-person antecedents), she left the story incomplete—we are not told what happened to June and the boy. The third sentence, in fact, had no period mark, leaving the impression that the writing was abruptly interrupted. The drawing that Karen spent much time on also seemed to have very little connection with the writing, as seen below in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Karen’s drawing of a castle
The drawing is of a castle, with the stereotypical towers that are commonly depicted in children’s stories. How that is related to June’s dance with the boy, though, is not immediately clear.

At the superficial level, Karen’s three-month project appeared to be a failure. She had only written fifteen words, which did not quite tell a story in the conventionally sense. Seeing that Karen had made very little progress in her writing, the teacher called her aside for a private conferencing session. As with Mark, the teacher asked her to describe the drawing and how it related to the story. It took quite a while for Karen to open up; slowly, she revealed that the castle actually represented the happy ending for both June and the boy, which the teacher learned was a prince. The teacher at first thought that June and the prince fell in love after the dance and got married. Karen, however, introduced two further elements into her tale—a complication and a resolution (cf. Labov & Waletzky, 1967)—both of which were absent in Mark’s story. She talked about a girl who was jealous of June and tried to dance with the prince (complication). The prince, however, chose June over the jealous girl (resolution).

The teacher then encouraged Karen to write these details down. She used specific questions to help her along—e.g., “what was the girl’s name?”, “how did she behave?”, “what did she do?”, etc. Using the questions as a guide, Karen wrote a short passage, and then ended the description with a sentence of her own emphasizing the fact that the boy still liked June.

There was a girl named Jill

Jill was jalas jealous for June’s lovely dance

Jill pushed June away she wanted to dance with the boy. But the boy sill still like June.

While the above passage does contain a number of errors, it should be noted that Karen wrote out the sentences on her own, relying only on her teacher’s questions. She did not ask the teacher if her sentences were grammatically acceptable or if her words were correctly spelled. Her use of the word “jealous” (i.e., “jalas”), in particular, is interesting as it is not an easy word for a six year old to spell; she was determined, though, to include it, and gamely combined the letters to match her pronunciation of the word. Like Mark, Karen was encouraged by her own progress, and included an additional sentence, almost symbolically, to show both the teacher and, importantly, herself of what she could accomplish.
Conclusion

Factors hindering children from writing are often difficult to tell. Some may mistake the children’s reluctance to write as nothing more than a passing phase in their learning process. But this reluctance may be symptomatic of a confidence problem, as faced by the weaker learners in this study. The effect is paralyzing—the more insecure the children are about their writing abilities, the less they will be motivated to write, thus feeding the insecurity within and exacerbating the situation. But if this problem is detected early enough, even at the pre-school level, teachers can help their students avoid further difficulties in their later schooling years.

This paper suggests that this early detection can be facilitated by engaging the children in a simple write-and-draw project. By observing both the children’s writing processes and final products, teachers will be in a better position to offer mediated instruction to help the children realize the potential in themselves. Drawings, in particular, are needed in such projects as they serve as an alternate semiotic resource for children, often carrying information that is absent in the writing. Indeed, when considering the final product at the end of the project, this study urges teachers to pay special attention to the children’s drawings as a means to build up the children’s confidence and so address specific areas of weaknesses in their written work. This can be done by encouraging the children to describe their drawings, and using simple, appropriate questions to keep the conversation focused. The children’s answers to these questions, in turn, serve as a guide to help them fill in the missing details in their own work. To be sure, this approach, which relies on the conferencing method, is time intensive. But the potential benefits that it brings makes it well worth the while. A further point to note is that although the advantages of the conferencing method are well documented, such studies tend to involve older learners (e.g., Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005). This study indicates, tentatively, that even the youngest of writers can also benefit from conferencing.

And what of spelling and grammar—should the weaker learners be taught the correct forms right from the very start? This, of course, depends on the aptitude of the children in each class. While more can be done (and at a quicker pace) with some children, a slower approach is perhaps best with others. In this present study, it did not appear wise to overload Mark and Karen with feedback about the superficial errors in their writing. The goal was more to change their self-defeating mindset than to get them to produce error-free sentences. In trying to build up their confidence to write more, the last thing that they needed was to be told that their spelling and grammar were also in a mess. Such negative feedback would only add to their sense of insecurity, and cancel out any fledgling interest they might have had about writing. While the additional sentences that Mark and Karen wrote may not seem like much, they are nevertheless baby steps forward for two children who would have preferred to do as little writing as possible. They are encouraging signs that, with the proper support and encouragement, children like Mark and Karen can be helped. Once the foundation is firmer, the teacher can then introduce other measures to correct systemic flaws in spelling and grammar.
A qualitative study of this nature certainly needs to be verified by further work on a larger scale. In the short term, controlled studies involving larger groups of children from diverse different backgrounds are needed to test and refine the proposed approach. In the medium to long term, collaborative work among teachers from different schools could be initiated. Experiences can then be shared to provide pre-school teachers (and researchers) with a pool of strategies to handle children with different needs. It is only through such shared experiences that trends in the literacy development of young learners can be observed and further explored.

Notes

1. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, p. 192) are careful to note that the positioning of elements may be assigned different information values in cultures adopting different reading paths, e.g., texts in Arabic are read from right to left.

2. Their names have been changed to protect their identities.

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References


The Importance of Participatory Evaluation in Achieving Quality and Accreditation

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Abstract

Almost all academic institutions around the world – and in Saudi Arabia in particular – are looking to accredit both themselves and their academic programmes, and in accordance with this, The Department of English Language (DEL) at King Faisal University (KFU) is seeking to accredit its programme in English Language. One step towards achieving this goal would be to survey and review key aspects, notions, and systems in programme evaluation, especially those employed by others locally, regionally, and internationally. Therefore, this paper will shed some light on different methods of evaluation, and stress the importance of participatory evaluation in the quest to assure quality and achieve accreditation.

Keywords: Programme; evaluation; participatory; quality; accreditation; quantitative; qualitative.
Overview

Programme evaluation is a very important component in the process of education. Murphy (1985:2) in Rea-Dickins (1994) points out that 'Evaluation should be an integral part of the working of the curriculum to ensure that what is done is worthwhile, necessary, and sufficient'. However, there is a frequent tendency for evaluation to be left until the end of the programme – that is if it is integrated at all.

Yet, it cannot be ignored that evaluation is a very complex process that involves a lot of aspects. According to Lynch (2003:1), programme evaluation is 'the systematic inquiry into instructed sequences for the purpose of making decisions or providing opportunity for reflection and action.' This definition underlines the three main purposes of evaluation suggested by Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1992), which are: making decisions about the accountability (i.e. the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme); taking actions to better the curriculum; and providing opportunities for teacher development. Thus, the aims of evaluation do not only 'respond to demands of accountability but also … support institutional, curriculum and staff development.' (Rea-Dickins 1994:73). I would agree with Allison’s argument (1999:57) that these purposes are not mutually exclusive. In addition to this, evaluation can be formative (i.e. ongoing/during the programme) and summative (at the end of programme), and it can be carried out by outsiders and/or insiders.

This paper offers a brief discussion on the quantitative and qualitative debate before examining the notion of participatory evaluation (PE) – to avoid repetition, PE is referred to here as participatory evaluation not programme evaluation– in relation to these two approaches. It will focus mainly on the feasibility, usefulness, and purposes of PE, and look at arguments both for and against this process. The paper will then conclude with a discussion on the value of the two approaches and the usefulness (or the otherwise) of PE and its application at KFU.

The Quantitative Approach

This is the traditional, scientific approach to data collection and analysis that attempts to verify some preferred viewpoints (Mackay et al. 1995). Another names for this approach is (logical) positivist (Oakley 2000). Two advocates of this approach are Suchman (1967) and Shadish (1995). It deals with either a true experimental or quasi-experimental design (Guba & Lincoln 1989, cited in Lynch 1996:15). In a true experimental design, subjects are randomly divided into two groups; one of these comes under the treatment, while the other is considered the control group and receives another programme. Pre-test(s) and post-test(s) would normally be included for both groups. In a quasi-experimental design, on the other hand, all the subjects receive the same treatment without having a control group. Lynch (1996) also mentions the non-equivalent control group where there is no random allocation of students.

The data is collected by measures that lend themselves to being turned into numbers and statistics. Examples might include test scores and the number of males and females in a programme (Brown 1989). The strengths of this approach lie in its 'meaningful, credible, trustworthy, accurate, and confirmable findings' through using the scientific method (Mackay et al. 1995). The findings can be easily analysed and interpreted, as this approach deals mostly with fixed items with predetermined information rather than open-ended questions, and usually there are no subjective decisions involved (Richards 2001). Weir & Roberts (1994) argue that it is more applicable to large scale studies, as is exemplified by both the Colorado (see Scherer, G. ...
and Wertheimer, M. 1964 for more) and the Pennsylvania (See Clarke, J.D. 1969 for more) projects, the aims of which were to evaluate the best foreign language teaching (F.L.T.) methods.

However, the quantitative approach suffers from the problems of control on the experiment variables and the lack of objectivity in the choice of the measures used to collect the data (Alderson 1994, Lynch 1996). Furthermore, the difficulty in randomising the samples and designing appropriate tests cannot be ignored. Thus, some researchers began to consider a move to the qualitative approach like Guba & Lincoln (1981) and Stake (1980).

The Qualitative Approach

Other names for this approach are ‘naturalist’ and ‘interpretivist’ (Oakley 2000, Lynch 2003). This method of analysis is naturalistic and less rigorous than the quantitative approach (Richards 2001), and seeks not to support any preferred viewpoints. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), phenomena are best studied and understood in their context. The qualitative approach is ‘exploratory, descriptive and discovery oriented in purpose’ (Weir & Roberts 1994:159). It also gives a very detailed description of the learning process, attitude, and behaviour, and explains why the programme has worked or failed (Weir & Roberts 1994). It uses measures such as observations, diaries, interviews, journals, logs, documents, reports, and case studies, which usually cannot be expressed numerically (Richards 2001). The illuminative model, which can also be expressed in numbers when appropriate, is one example of those that use qualitative data.

There are, however, some problems with this approach. First, it suits small numbers, and second, it has the potential to generate huge amounts of information. This is why Lynch (1996) recommends focusing on specific purposes in order to overcome the latter problem. Indeed, the large quantity of information produced can make data coding and interpretation most difficult and problematic, and can also produce results that cannot be generalised to other situations. Furthermore, the qualitative approach lacks objectivity and credibility due to its reliance on subjective decisions, in which case a triangulation approach – i.e. gathering data from several sources and/or using different techniques (Lynch 1996) – would be the ideal solution. Although there might be contradictory findings gathered from both techniques, one may clear the ambiguity of the other. Indeed, Lynch benefited greatly from combining the two approaches in his ‘Reading English for Science and Technology’ (REST 1992) project, in which he used qualitative data to clear the contradiction brought about by the findings of the pre- and post-tests. Correspondingly, the quantitative data clarified the contradiction of the learners' views towards grammar instructions. Lynch also claims that by mixing both paradigms he could reach very concise conclusions (Lynch 2003). Moreover, Weir and Roberts (1994) note that quantitative measures can be the start of gathering the qualitative data, and they see them as being complementary to each other. Other researchers, however, argue against the reconciliation of both quantitative and qualitative methods, highlighting 'cost efficiency and lack of procedures' as reasons for not using both (Lynch 1996:16) (see appendix 1 for a comparison between the two methods).

Moving on from this debate, the question that remains is who is going to conduct and participate in these methods?
Who?

In previous years, it has been preferable for evaluation to be conducted by 'outsiders', otherwise termed as 'JIJOES' which is an abbreviation of Jet-in-jet-out experts: they jet in for evaluating the programme in a short time then jet out (Alderson and Scott 1992) or fly-in-fly-out (Weir & Roberts 1994). For example, Elley (1989, cited in Silvester 1997) stresses the need for impartiality in evaluation, thus hinting at a preference for outsiders; similarly, Davies (1992) 'shows a preference for external evaluation' (cited in Allison 1999). On the other hand, Rea-Dickens and Germaine (1992) emphasise the importance of internal evaluations. I would argue that, ideally, external evaluations should be linked to internal evaluations.

Thus, we have explored in brief the weaknesses and strengths of the quantitative and qualitative approaches. What follows is a discussion concerning the notion of participatory evaluation, along with an exploration into its usefulness and feasibility, and an illustration of its advantages, disadvantages, and examples.

The Notion of Participatory Evaluation

The notion of PE is relatively 'new to the field of programme evaluation' (Lewkowicz & Nunan 1999:681). Some researchers have emphasised its importance and desirability; for instance, (Freire, 1970) Waters (1987) and Sharp (1989) state the importance of involving learners and teachers in course evaluation without mentioning any involvement of outsiders. Hopkins (1989:28) also hinted at this when speaking of evaluation as school improvement, in which 'the role of evaluator and the user are linked'. Moreover, Nunan (1989) urges for collaborative approach in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP), and researchers such as Alderson & Scott (1992), Alderson (1994), Mackay (1994, 1995) and Weir & Roberts (1994) have emphasised the importance of the participation of 'insiders' or 'stakeholders', and 'outsiders' in the evaluation process. Alderson (1994:2) believes that evaluation can be participatory 'when the decision making and planning of an evaluation, as well as its execution and reporting, is shared amongst all those involved in the project being evaluated, as well as by outsiders commissioned for the same purpose.' From this definition we see how the stakeholders must have an 'active role and involvement in the process of evaluation' (Mackay 1995), rather than standing apart, watching (Alderson & Scott 1992), and it distinguishes between those who plan and those who execute (Lilley 2005). Alderson also stresses that stakeholders should gain benefit, training, and experience from their involvement.

Although participatory evaluation is qualitative in its nature, I would argue that it can combine both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on the purpose. In a sense it is also illuminative when insiders highlight necessary information for the outsiders, or when both shed light on weaknesses and strengths for the decision makers. Furthermore, PE and other illuminative approaches are considered to be more democratic than the classical approach where stakeholders can express their points of view. In addition, PE is more formative than it is summative (Alderson & Scott 1992), but I would argue that it can sometimes combine the two (Lynch 2003), as there can be 'no evaluation purely summative nor purely formative' (Alderson & Scott 1992:39).
The Importance of Participatory Evaluation

Al Fraidan

Purpose

It is my argument that PE can correspond to the three main purposes of evaluation: accountability, improvement, and teacher development. These purposes, however, can overlap; indeed, all three can be included in one project (Lynch 2003). Yet, it is obvious that participatory evaluation corresponds to the betterment purpose more than the others. This can be justified through a careful examination of Alderson's definition (1994), in which he stresses the benefits and experience gained by insiders' involvement. Therefore, although there are different aims and purposes for evaluation within each project, I would argue that the ultimate goal would be for insiders to develop their skills and expertise.

Usefulness

Calder (1994) and Alderson (1994) claim that the job of the outsiders cannot be completed without the cooperation of the insiders. It is my opinion that, whilst both outsiders and insiders could do the work without the assistance of the other, the results produced would not be as informative or reliable as those that would be obtained through working together. Indeed, teamwork such as this would enable the outsiders to train the insiders, thus improving the skills of the latter. Outsiders also can bring new perspectives (Mackay 1995), and accordingly, Lynch (1992, cited in Alderson & Beretta 1992) recommended that, instead of having just an insider perspective, the EST project in the University of Guadalajara should also involve an outsider, which might have led to more reliability and new findings.

When it comes to issues of time, PE can ease a lot of difficulties. For example, baseline data can often only be obtained by insiders (Weir & Roberts 1994), yet outsiders will need to gather it for their studies. Indeed, Lynch (2003:16) sees it as a mistake not to involve stakeholders from the primary level.

Furthermore, in instances where there are time restrictions or the need for improvement is urgent, a collaborative work would be the solution. Alderson and Scott (1992) emphasise the importance of allowing time for writing reports. This is something that can be done effectively using PE, as the task can be shared between both parties. In some cases, however, the availability of outsiders is limited (Alderson 1994), and in these instances insiders can do the 'donkey work' (Alderson & Scott 1992) whilst the outsiders observe, legitimate the work, and help with reporting and analysing.

Moreover, when stakeholders are involved in the process their willingness towards the project will increase, which subsequently increases the readiness. This, according to Mackay (1995), is a key to success. Such involvement can also create an enthusiastic, collaborative environment as well as increase the stakeholders' awareness of what is going on in the programme. Furthermore, it may lead to self-evaluation, then to action research, and then to self-improvement. Equally important is the 'ownership' feeling – that is the degree to which the participants feel that the innovation 'belongs' to them (Kennedy 1988). Kennedy believes that ownership is an important condition in evaluation for change; however, ownership alone is not enough to ensure success (Lilley 2005).

In some circumstances, PE has led to a change in attitude. For instance, in the Geneva project (1994) the stakeholders' attitude changed from one of 'no involvement' to 'demanding full
control'. Similarly, in Morrow & Schocker's (1993) INSET project, teachers' attitudes were seen to change and they began to consider transferring their experience to their own contexts.

Furthermore, PE can satisfy both bureaucratic and democratic demands, as well as fulfilling administrative needs. The findings of a given situation can be used as the basis of another programme, and although PE is situation-specific, its findings might be germane to other similar contexts.

Feasibility

The apparent feature of PE is that it is democratic, and Waters (1987) argues that PE can only be feasible when there is democracy in the evaluation context. Thus, it cannot be applicable when the educational system is very bureaucratic and does not allow stakeholders to participate in decision making. Waters goes on to claim that PE (involving learners in ESP contexts) is a risky business, but is not impossible.

I agree with Alderson and Scott’s argument (1992) that to constitute a PE model two conditions must be met: there should be an active involvement of insiders in almost all stages, and they must benefit from the process. Alderson and Scott also insist that the need for training should not weaken participation.

Furthermore, we must not forget that PE is likely to take a lot of time and effort. Moreover, sometimes it may not suit the initial stages of evaluation if the stakeholders have not been clearly identified from the beginning (Lewkowicz & Nunan 1999). Worse still, insiders can perceive outsiders as being a threat. Nonetheless, this misunderstanding can be avoided in different ways, such as ensuring the early involvement of insiders, and articulating the aims of the project to ensure familiarity between both parties. However, this familiarity can sometimes prevent the insiders from freely expressing their opinions (Silvester 1997). Furthermore, we must give consideration to the cultural mismatch between insiders and outsiders (Kennedy 1988), as this may either cause conflict or lead to change in the target culture.

Examples of some International Projects

In order to gain insight into the best procedures for designing a method of programme evaluation, it is important to look at the experiences of others who have formulated processes in the past. In doing so, we may benefit by adopting those methods proved to be strong, and overcoming those shown to be weak.

Alderson & Scott 1992: The ESP Project in Brazil

This project came at a time when there was an intrinsic desire for evaluation in the Brazilian Federal Universities, and it was a much-publicised attempt to involve stakeholders in the process.

Alderson and Scott emphasised the importance of involving as many participants as possible within the seven stages of the evaluation in order to ensure success and minimise any feeling of threat between the participants (see appendix 2 to learn who was involved in each stage). This project was considered to be a success, although there were some problems encountered, namely: the length of time it took; the stakeholders’ lack of training; inadequate and incomplete data.
collection; difficulty in data interpretation; inadequate sampling; and lack of classroom observation. Berretta (1992) also mentions the 'high price to pay' for such an evaluation. However, Alderson and Scott (1992) believe that PE is 'possible and rewarding'.

Williams & Burden 1994: The Geneva Project

This project took place in a primary school in Geneva in which the headmaster wanted to run an 'immersion' social studies programme, and thus sought help. The outside evaluators chose an illuminative approach enabling questions and problems to arise naturally. Quantitative and qualitative data were used and discussed in two phases. The results were promising in the sense that the stakeholders' attitudes changed; where previously their misunderstanding of the project's aim had led them to perceive it as being a threat, they developed more of a desire to own the evaluation, and also recognised the need for cooperation.

Mackay et al. 1994: The Bali Project by ELTPU

ELTPU stands for English Language Teaching Projects Unit. In this project involving the participation of 25 schools in Indonesia, Mackay et al. (1994) used a collaborative model. The aims of the project were to assess the centres' practices and activities, and to ensure maximum quality of the programmes. A performance indicator framework was used, which was agreed on by all of the stakeholders without being imposed on them (see appendix 3). This framework consisted of units (e.g. institutes), which were then divided into foci (e.g. programmes). Each focus was broken down into key areas (e.g. quality of each course) which in turn were given performance indicators (e.g. for each course: complete documentation). These indicators were then broken down into ‘themes’. Collected information was compared against these indicators in order to assess the level of weakness or strength in each theme. In a sense, this method resembles Stake's countenance model (1980, See Hopkins (1989) for more about this model).

The project managers established that for this collaborative model to work, it would require minimal training of its participants in order to ensure their involvement. The project included an investigation into what could be improved and which matters were urgent. All in all, the project was considered a success.

Lewkowicz & Nunan 1999: The Hong Kong IELP Project

IELP stands for Intensive English Language Programme. This project took place in the secondary-school system in Hong Kong with multiple stakeholders. It lasted for three years, focusing on different aspects in each year. The stakeholders were not involved from the beginning because they were not identified in advance. The aim of the project was to introduce a bridging programme to change the medium of instruction from Chinese into English. Similar to the ESP Brazil project, there was an intrinsic motivation for evaluation aroused from the teachers' classrooms. They used a model that was characterised by five principles (see appendix 4). Both quantitative and qualitative data were used, gained through questionnaires, classroom observation, and written language samples. These findings were detailed in a draft and then a final report. Although the project was considered a success, evaluators were faced with a number of problems. Some of the teachers were recruited and thus had no interest in the project, therefore levels of motivation differed. Personnel kept changing, and there was a general lack of appreciation of the model's five principles. Furthermore, some participants saw it as being the
The Importance of Participatory Evaluation  

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evaluators' job to decide how to proceed in each stage, and stakeholders regarded the outsiders as a threat, and the workshop discussion as criticism.

Therefore, whilst Lewkowicz and Nunan argue that a participatory model was the most appropriate one for the project, a true collaboration was not possible due to the problems faced.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Participatory Evaluation

The inherent problem with PE – and one that has caused a lot of criticism – is the issue concerning the time it takes to carry out the work and collect the data, and this is especially apparent when comparing it to the JIJO model. In addition, the 'high price to pay' (Beretta 1992) and data analysis can cause difficulties and be time consuming.

Sometimes insiders rely on outsiders for some of the work as they are the experts (e.g. the Hong Kong project). Outsiders are considered more objective, clear-sighted, of a higher status, and more experienced – but not always necessary (Alderson & Scott 1992). However, Wolter (2000) notes that problems can be avoided by using the participants' knowledge of the local learning/teaching situation. Yet, some teachers would consider such involvement to create an extra workload, especially if they are poorly paid (Kennedy 1988). On the other hand, insiders are more familiar with their context. They are more reliable, and are better at evaluating the worthiness of their programme than outsiders. Furthermore, they take action despite their lack of skills in data collection and making recommendations. PE offers them a chance to increase their skills, which might lead to self-evaluation and bring about improvements. Insiders also have no investment, thus they are less biased. Therefore, the question that remains is ... why are outsiders still more favoured? (Alderson & Scott 1992).

The KFU Institutional Accreditation Project (11/11)

This project was given the motto ‘11/11’ after the date (11/11/2011) that was set for the external reviewers to make a decision about KFU’s eligibility to achieve institutional accreditation.

KFU made a previous attempt at this in 2008 and external reviewers issued around 80 recommendations. In 2011, other external reviewers checked the university’s practices and found that it fulfilled more than 75% of the previous recommendations. One reason for this was the implementation of a partial notion of participatory evaluation. KFU suffered from a low number of responses to students’ surveys. I suggested introducing incentives for completing the surveys, such as ipads and iphones, and after this the rate of response started to increase. Staff members’ surveys are not open to the public yet, and their voices have started to reach higher administrations.

The DEL at KFU decided to look for an accrediting agency to review its BA programme in English Language, which includes four domains (language skills, linguistics, translation, and Literature). To pass the review successfully, the DEL needs to incorporate all of the models and criteria set up by others (see appendices), as well as to demonstrate that it has benefited from its last two experiences.
Conclusion

Although the quantitative approach is scientific, saves time and produces more reliable findings, it does not describe the process of the evaluation, which is a major problem. Moreover, Mackay (1994:314) claims that evaluation is not 'an experiment nor a controlled group'. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, lacks credibility due to its large element of subjectivity. It also takes a lot of time and there are difficulties involved in coding the data. Mackay (1994) argues that subjectivity should be minimised in both approaches. However, we cannot single out one method as being superior, as the suitability of each would depend on its purpose (Weir & Roberts 1994). Therefore, giving preference to just one method over the other would be 'inappropriate and unrealistic' (Alderson 1994:13). Ideally, both techniques should be involved in any evaluation, as evaluators would benefit greatly from both, especially in a participatory model.

Of course, PE still has the potential problems of the 'high price to pay' and the large time frame that it requires. Nevertheless, Rea-Dickens and Germaine (1998) point out that PE eases data collection, contributes to the participants' commitment to the changes being evaluated (ownership), and enhances professionalism within the field. Therefore, the KFU's Department of English Language, and indeed all the other sectors within the university, should target a participatory evaluation in their accreditation project.

Ultimately, participatory evaluation is considered to be the most satisfactory model and one that is superior to others (Alderson 1994). As Alderson and Scott (1992) note, it fits the Chinese saying, 'Tell me, I forget; show me, I remember; involve me, I learn.'

About the author

Dr. Al Fraidan received his MA and PhD from Essex University, UK. He is working as an assistant professor in the English Language Department at King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia since 2010 up to now. He is holding three positions at King Faisal university: Vice-dean of E-learning & Distance Education Deanship, Head of the English Language Department, Director of the English Language Centre.
References:


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Appendices:
Appendix 1: A table showing the differences between the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Oakley 2000 cited in Bennett 2003).

<table>
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<th>Oakley’s summary of the two main paradigms of educational research and evaluation</th>
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<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Nature of truth statements</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Image of reality</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Research product</strong></td>
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Taken from Oakley, 2000, 26–7.
Appendix 2: A table of the seven stages in the Brazil Project, showing who was involved in each stage (Alderson & Beretta 1992:42)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Insiders</th>
<th>Outsiders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designing the whole evaluation</td>
<td>UT *</td>
<td>EC *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing the instruments</td>
<td>UC **</td>
<td>SP *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing them out</td>
<td>PC **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data</td>
<td>RA **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting the report</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and learning from it</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: * = approximate degree of involvement
? = no evidence available
UT – University Teachers
UC – University Co-ordinators (who are also UTs)
PC – São Paulo Project Co-ordinators
RA – Research Assistants in CEPRIL (stay approx. 2 years)
EC – External Consultant
SP – Sponsors

A fuller description of these stages is to be found in Celani et al. (1988) especially Chapter 3.
Appendix 3: The performance indicator framework used in the Bali Project (Mackay 1994:147)
Appendix 4: The Five Principles Model used in the Hong Kong Project (Lewkowicz & Nunan 1999:688)

1. Negotiate a set of procedural principles for the conduct of the evaluation. In line with Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998), we believed that this stage was most important because, as evaluators, we were keen on enhancing the commitment of all those involved in the evaluation process to the principles of the evaluation. We also believed that such negotiation would help reduce the “them-and-us” dichotomy that often arises when evaluators are brought in from outside (the IIJOE syndrome).

2. Develop an evaluation brief in collaboration with the stakeholders. Because the evaluation was to last for 3 years, it was important to determine how and when the data were to be collected and to elicit the help of the course directors and teachers in collecting the data; again, this step was necessary if stakeholders were to be committed to an evaluation, according to Rea-Dickins and Germaine (1998). At the outset we recognized that data were to be collected selectively over the 3 years and that everyone concerned needed to understand the focus of each phase of data collection.

3. Collect data from all stakeholders. To fully appreciate what was going on during the teaching and to understand why some students who had the opportunity to enroll failed to do so, we needed to obtain data from all stakeholders. We also needed to view all groups of stakeholders as equally important in providing input for the data-gathering process.

4. Negotiate the content of reports and recommendation. Again, we believed that the evaluation should be seen not as top-down but as one involving a number of parties.

5. Provide feedback to the participants in the form of interactive workshops. Such workshops, though possibly novel in their approach, would in our opinion provide an opportunity for dialogue and for planning future stages of the evaluation, which was important for a long-term project.
Promoting Cooperative Learning in ELT Classes through the Use of CoRT Thinking Tools

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Abstract:

The author examines the use of CoRT (Cognitive Research Trust at Cambridge) Thinking Tools in Cooperative Learning activities in undergraduate university English language classes at a private university in Turkey. CoRT I and CoRT IV thinking lessons are demonstrated to provide practical and accessible content for ELT cooperative learning activities for learners at various language ability levels. Results demonstrate that students increased their facility and knowledge of cooperative learning strategies through use of CoRT thinking tools, and, as a corollary result, promoted writing and speaking in real-life contexts. Survey results show that students intend to use cooperative learning in their teaching. Written responses include CoRT lesson work cards and student anecdotal reports. Group presentations and peer feedback are shown to increase facility and confidence with spoken language. Evidence indicates that CoRT tools used in cooperative learning assist students to break down participatory barriers, develop different ways of framing situations, and develop greater language use and interactive discussion amongst learners, with opportunities for immediate, specific contextualized feedback in a low-risk environment. Using cooperative learning strategies with CoRT thinking tools is shown to be an adaptable strategy for initiating productive language.

Keywords: CoRT (Cognitive Research Trust at Cambridge) Thinking Tools; ELT, cooperative learning; creative thinking; productive language.
Introduction

Established as a private university in 2009, Mevlana University, Konya, opened its doors to students in the fall of 2010. In the first year of operation, the University (due to a selection process of the Turkish Higher Education Authority), accepted both students who scored well above the median in the Higher Education Examination-Undergraduate Placement Examination (Yükseköğretim Geçiş Sınavı-Lisans Yerleştirme Sınavı, YGS-LYS, 2012) testing as part of the Student Selection and Placement System (Öğrenci Seçme ve Yerleştirme Sistemi, ÖSYS, 2012), along with those students who scored poorly but who chose the option of attending a private foundation university as their higher education option. As there was no English preparatory year program in place at that time, students entered their respective programs directly. Given the accommodation made for acceptance, students exhibited a wide range of English language proficiency. The sample population was enrolled in a first-year ELT reading and writing course, a second-year oral communications class, with the remainder in a Medical English productive language course.

Given the remarkable changing social and learning environments of this century, educators have come to realize the need to provide opportunities for students to acquire social skills that incorporate interpersonal communication, develop cooperation, foster intercultural competency (Kurt & McKeown, 2012), and support conflict resolution. As these skills are deemed essential to success in school, employability and for a satisfying life, cooperative learning has emerged as a powerful method for fostering student achievement, social development and educational cultural convergence (Diboll & McKeown, 2011).

Review of Literature

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning is essentially a set of instructional methods in which students work together in small, mixed-ability learning groups in order to maximize their own and each other’s learning (Slavin, 1986) and their understanding of a subject. The students in each group are responsible for learning the content taught, and for helping their group members learn. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping other group members learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work through an assignment until all the group members successfully understand and complete it.

Extensive research has provided overwhelming support on the usefulness of cooperative learning. During the past 90 years, more than 600 studies have been conducted by a wide variety of researchers in cooperative learning and more is known about the efficacy of cooperative learning than almost any other facet of education (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Cooperative learning is recognized as an approach that allows students to cooperate with one another, lessens competitive behaviors, increases overall learning and enhances interpersonal relationships (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1993).
Researchers studying the effects of cooperative learning on achievement found positive academic outcomes for cooperative learning compared to competitive and individualistic learning. Slavin (1995) found that 72% of 68 comparative studies favored cooperative learning methods. In particular, three elements were found to contribute to its success: group rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunity. Similarly, Johnson and Stannes’ (2000) meta-analysis of over 300 studies found that the most positive outcomes prevail under conditions of positive interdependence, individual accountability and direct teaching of collaborative skills, and further that cooperation results in significantly higher achievement and retention than do either competitive and individualistic efforts.

In Lithuania, Klimoviene (2006) conducted research with 90 second-year Economics and Management students in Business English classes, focusing on the significance of cooperative learning activities in developing students’ thinking skills. The activities included asking pertinent questions, debating ideas, summarizing and synthesizing, critiquing ideas and communicating. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the use of cooperative learning and student performance in the listed activities. The research also revealed that students became more adept in critique, developing their own position, and making decisions based on support from group members.

Despite the diversity of cooperative learning approaches, cooperative learning shares five common attributes:

1. Positive Interdependence in which each group member’s efforts are required for combined success and where each group member is recognized with their own unique contribution to make to the joint effort. Within cooperative learning situations, students have two responsibilities to learn the assigned material, and to ensure that all members of the groups learn the material.

2. Face-to-Face Interaction is promoting each member’s success by providing each other with effective assistance, exchanging information and resources, processing information efficiently, providing feedback, challenging conclusions, reasoning to promote greater insight into the problems being considered, and, by maintaining low anxiety and stress levels.

3. Individual and Group Accountability is essential as the group comes to recognize who needs more assistance, support and encouragement in completing a task. Group members recognize that they cannot “hitchhike” on the work of others.

4. Interpersonal and Small-group Skills are activated when students accept and support each other, communicate accurately and unambiguously, and resolve conflict constructively.

5. Group Processing provides the opportunity for group members to share how they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Throughout this process, they describe what member actions are helpful and not helpful, and consequently decide about what behaviors ought to continue or change (Kagan, 1992).

As working in groups requires the use of interpersonal and small-group skills, students are given opportunities to practice these skills. With the goal of meeting individual learning needs within a heterogeneous, cooperative learning lesson, Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1993) describe a six-step process for directly teaching cooperative skills:

1. Identify the skill by naming it and defining it
2. Explain why it is needed
3. Demonstrate the skill
4. Provide opportunities to use and practice the skill
5. Provide feedback on the skill
6. Reflect on the performance of the skills and set further goals.

There are benefits to using cooperative learning methods. Based on compiled cooperative learning research by Marzano and Associates (2001), using groups is a better teaching option than not using groups at all, and that organizing groups based on ability levels is best done sparingly. Homogenous grouping seems to have a positive effect on student achievement when compared to no grouping. But it is heterogeneous groupings that provide the most substantial gains in student attainment.

(ii) Rationale for using cooperative learning strategies in second-language instruction

Krashen’s (2003) input hypothesis posits that a low anxiety setting helps comprehensible input build students’ language competence. Swain (2000) in the output hypothesis shows that to learn a second language, in addition to comprehensible input, students need to create comprehensible output. Comprehensible output involves students speaking and writing in a manner that others can understand. Based on social-cultural theory (Lantolf, 2000), demonstrates that learners make faster progress than they could on their own because what students can do at first when working with others, they can later do on their own. In this way, interaction helps promote effective learning. Research in task-based language teaching (Edwards & Willis, 2005) demonstrates that learning is facilitated when students use language to perform meaningful tasks. Tasks encourage purposeful language use, allow learners to solve problems using their own resources, and encourage them to reflect on their language use.

(iii) The Cognitive Research Trust at Cambridge – The CoRT Thinking Program

The CoRT Thinking Program lessons have been in use since 1970 in many countries (Edward de Bono, 2012) for the direct teaching of thinking. The CoRT Thinking Program endures due to the concrete nature of the lessons, which are “simple, practical, clear, focused and serious” (6:2012). The lessons have been used in a range of schools from elite to disadvantaged, mainly by teachers without previous training in the use of the lessons. The format allows easy access to instruction to a wide age range and for differing abilities, and, for L2 learners. For de Bono, basic thinking processes are the same for any age and levels of ability. Lateral thinking materials developed by Edward de Bono have been advocated for use in the ELT classroom by Simon Mumford (2006) previously.

Each lesson presents a new thinking tool. CoRT I “breadth” thinking lessons are taught first. After the initial few lessons, a variety of tools can be introduced. The lessons all follow the same format for consistency. Tools from CoRT I include, for example, “APC” (Alternatives, Possibilities, and Choices), “CAF” (Consider All Factors) and “FiP” (First Important Priorities). Interestingly, the strangeness of the tool names appeals to students. Each student receives a copy of the reproducible student tool workcard where practice topics are provided. The complete
CoRT Thinking Programme is available on CD from The Edward de Bono Foundation and is broken into six segments of ten lessons each:

- **CoRT I**: Breadth. This section helps students broaden perception.
- **CoRT II**: Organization. The tools give students a variety of tools to organize their thinking.
- **CoRT III**: Interaction. Helps students observe the thinking involved in arguments, how a point of view is presented or defended, and the value and types of evidence.
- **CoRT IV**: Creativity. Students learn tools to generate fresh new solutions to challenges.
- **CoRT V**: Information and Feeling. Tools used to separate emotions from facts.
- **CoRT VI**: Action. This section begins with purposes, and ends with specific action steps for the implementation of the outcome of thinking.

Edward de Bono defines thinking as “the operating skill with which intelligence acts upon experience” and notes that “thinking is the deliberate exploration of experience for a purpose” (11:1982). He maintains, however, that there is sufficient individuality in thinking styles to suggest that thinking may be a skill which can be developed and improved. De Bono (1970) cautioned that too much logical thinking which focuses only on judgments of right and wrong can be defective as it omits the generative and creative aspects of thinking. He maintains that the way to achieve an expansion of thinking is via a conscious and deliberate thinking which involves provocation, exploration and risk-taking, and allows the thinker to come up with novel ideas and solutions. For de Bono, being a thinker involves deliberately practicing and focusing on the “operating skill” (9:1982), and similar to any skill development, such as playing football, can be improved over time. One of the core advantages of using CoRT thinking program workcards is that the format is simple, the language is accessible to the participants, and further, the lessons are engaging, interactive, dynamic and enjoyable.

**Population**

The sample population was composed of 94 undergraduate students (59 female and 33 male), aged 18-22, at a private university in Turkey. Students in the sample population were taught by the author in: (i) two sections of Advanced Reading and Writing in a first-year undergraduate ELT education degree program; (ii) one section of a second-year of Oral Communications course also part of an undergraduate ELT education degree program; and, (iii) one section of medical candidates studying productive English language skills as part of their first-year program of studies in the Faculty of Medicine. Students were advised that they were not required to participate in the study but that a group presentation was part of the required course term work.
All students willingly agreed to participate in the research and CoRT presentations. Language proficiency varied amongst the participants and, based on levels associated with the Common European Language Framework (CEF), were A1 through B1.

Methodology

Cooperative learning strategies were introduced at the outset of the courses to support peer editing, spoken interaction, and in writing workshops. The process involved explaining academic tasks and the cooperative learning strategy, specifying criteria, explaining positive interdependence and individual accountability, setting expected behaviors and structuring inter-group cooperation. During cooperative learning sections, the tutor monitored the groups and intervened when needed to improve task work or teamwork, resolve conflicts, or to bring a lesson to a close. The tutor reviewed group-skills and facilitated problem-solving, checked homework, initiated discussion, led reading groupings (reading and explaining in pairs, reading comprehension triads, and jigsaw/expert groups), and set writing compositions and dialogues. Most students reacted positively to the use of these strategies.

In planning cooperative learning, the author determined learning parameters including the use of target language within the lessons, group size, appropriate cooperative learning strategies, ways to assign students to groups, the choice of individual roles within the groups roles (e.g., summarizer, coach, record keeper, time-keeper, observer), and arrangement of the class to facilitate group interaction. In working with groups, the tutor noted that there was still some resistance to using groups, and as a result, decided to investigate if CoRT thinking tools would encourage students to adjust to a cooperative learning approach in their language classes.

The broad outlines of the CoRT programme were introduced and each class was guided through two tools, CoRT I “PMi” (positive, minus, interesting) and CoRT IV “Po” (a new thinking word used to encourage creativity). The class established a rationale that resources required would be limited to CoRT materials including the teacher notes from the handbooks. It was decided that session leaders would limit their speaking to one minute intervals (to avoid lengthy explanations or tedious power-point explanations and to focus on class responses), and that English would be used to discuss and record responses.

Students self-selected groups of three or four members and then chose one tool from CoRT I or CoRT IV to present in a participatory lesson format: the thinking tool combined with a cooperative learning strategy. Groups during their respective presentations led the class through the CoRT workcard sections (introduction, discussion, summary) for about 5-7 minutes to produce group responses for a total of 25-35 minutes per presentation. The student-led group presentations were held over a period of six weeks. Student-generated notes were written directly on CoRT workcards and were collected at the end of each session as evidence of the writing generated during the presentations. Students provided peer feedback orally on the presentation lessons.
A survey was completed by 94 participants at the beginning of the course. The survey was intended to: (i) access to what extent they knew about thinking as a subject area; (ii) reveal their past experience with cooperative learning and thinking strategies; and, (iii) determine what they might know about CoRT tools. The same survey was given to 67 participants at the end of the course to determine any changes. The survey consisted of 18 statements with Likert-scale responses consisting of “none”, “a bit”, “some”, “a lot”, and, “expertly”. Seven of the questions related directly to students’ experience of cooperative learning, five questions related to their exposure to CoRT thinking tools, and four questions focused on their “thinking” in past educational experience. There was also a space provided in which participants could add comments.

Findings

The findings are extracted from participants in three different language courses of 14 weeks with three contact hours per week. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus the CoRT responses that student groups were requested to gather on the workcards, the survey on cooperative learning strategies and thinking skills, and on student reflections and tutor observations during and after the process.

(i) Survey Results

Results of the first survey, given at the beginning of the course, were compared with the results of the same survey given at the completion of the course. The survey results indicate that students by the end of the course recognized more specifically what cooperative learning was, and that according to the survey, they “know about Cooperative Learning” (moving upward 10% through all scale items), “can name cooperative learning strategies” (moving upward through scale items from “none” at 30%, and “a bit at 31%, to “some” at 40%, and to “a lot” at 22%). When asked if they could “use the strategies in their ELT classes”, the results moved dramatically through 32% at “a bit” and “some”, upward to 20% at “some”, 50% at “a lot” and 25% to “expertly”.

Survey responses showed that students knew “something about what CoRT thinking tools can do” (from 32% at “none” and 33% at “a bit”, to 34% at “some” and 47% at “a lot” – a significant increase in their understanding). Responses to “I could use thinking techniques with students” showed a 29% increase overall, and “I could “select a thinking strategy and use it when needed” showed a 14% increase.

In a statement related to students’ experience of cooperative learning, “in high school my teachers used cooperative learning”, there was a significant decrease in the second survey. On the initial survey, students had believed that their teachers’ use of groups equated with cooperative learning, and afterward, they were better able to distinguish the difference between the two. In statements about the potential pedagogical application of cooperative learning, and
the possible use of CoRT thinking tools in their work as teachers: “cooperative learning can be used in ELT” had a 33% increase into “a lot” and “expertly” categories.

Responses to “individual learning is better than in groups” had a 18% increase. Surprisingly, after considering the above responses and the significant change in knowledge and attitude, for the statement, “I learn better on my own”, there were some individualistic hardliners: the result decreased. Perhaps this was due to a misunderstanding: they were responding to a prompt about what they had learned as an individual student in the class. There is a competitive student environment in Turkey with a strong emphasis on testing; these factors may also account for this emphasis on individual learning.

A limitation of the survey is that it did not address students’ affective perceptions of their development of productive language during the course sessions. This is a potential area for investigation by a future researcher. There was also a space provided for participants’ comments which will be examined as written feedback.

(ii) Written Feedback

Part of the findings are extracted from student-generated responses on the CoRT workcards, and from student comments. Included are comments that demonstrate their changing interest and commitment in using cooperative learning strategies and CoRT tools. Here is a selection of comments from Survey 1.

- I don’t know what is CoRT.
- I think my teachers made us to speak English in class.
- I think cooperative and individual activities may be balanced.
- Sometimes cooperative learning may be better.
- I want study alone.
- I think individual learning is better.
- Learning on my own helps me to concentrate on my work and to think deeper about it
- Absolutely individual learning is better than groups.
- Group studying isn’t useful.
- I think we couldn’t even write in groups.

In Survey 2, the number of comments received as well as their content show a shift toward using cooperative learning strategies in ELT classes, and a casual familiarity with CoRT materials.

- The group activities are helpful for my English.
- That was fun I used to think that it was hard to speak but can see now that it is not so hard.
- I liked them.
- It was good to work together.
- I liked the way we were able to talk without teacher bothering us
- I liked working with the other groups.
It seems too easy but then you get the tools can be used.
By using CoRT we learn the group way.
CL strategies can be useful for learning/teaching a foreign language.
I like CoRT thinking mostly because I improve myself much better in cooperative learning.
CoRT tools make us to speak more.
I am happy to use them.
It helped me to learn new words and know more about my friends.
Some situations learning in a group better.
Cooperative learning is something useful.
Working in groups may help us learn from other members of the group.
I now like working in groups.
I can use them but it was difficult.
I will use when teacher.

In examining the written responses on the CoRT workcards, it can be seen that their language use is functional and immediate, and was completed without editing or correction of errors. These samples showed that students could quickly produce written language, sometimes in phrases, and sometimes in sentences (utilizing the same grammatical structures; they found form of sentence syntax and structure and repeatedly used it), coherently, and on demand. It was interesting to note that in almost all cases, one person was responsible for the writing, and as the groups changed composition often, each participant had a turn as scribe. In response to the prompts, students aimed to capture their group members’ responses related to the tool, and to report these directly to the larger group. There was no evidence of a fear of writing but there was evidence to indicate that they were writing for meaning and for immediate communication. There were many examples of linguistic convergence (Giles and Smith, 1979) as seen in the translation of specific words or phrases from Turkish to English.

(iii) Peer Feedback
Students provided verbal feedback to the respective groups after each of the CoRT group presentations and were thus able to share immediately with their peers in a direct and responsive way. These comments began with simple statements such as “thanks” or “good job”, and developed into much more specific comments about the cooperative learning strategy that was used, the way that the group worked together, or on the effectiveness of the CoRT tool lesson. Based on comments taken from student reflections and peer feedback on CoRT presentations, they noted that CoRT lessons were an ideal vehicle for cooperative learning strategies. Students noted a significant increase in confidence that they exhibited while making their presentations, along with enhanced student participation and peer interaction.
Discussion

It may be worthwhile to note a few observational points on the mechanics of cooperative learning lessons using CoRT tools. It was found that groups of 3-4 worked effectively to provide enough time to illicit responses and participation, and that CoRT lessons worked most effectively when used in one lesson per week. As CoRT lessons adhere to the same structure, students could focus on the tool and this meant more time to focus on practice prior to presenting. In friendship groupings, participants demonstrated cooperative elements including group processing, accountability, and responsibility.

In the author’s experience, questions posed to the whole class were often answered by a few more able speakers who tended to dominate discussions, or not at all. With the class divided into groups, less able students have more opportunity to contribute with time available to think longer, giving those who are not as able in English the chance to have, and express, ideas. Groups allowed for as much thinking time as was needed (really a peer discussion), and with five smaller groups broken out for practice of the CoRT tool, there was five times as much discussion going in a class as there would have been without any groups.

Since during CoRT lessons small groups work independently from each other, at the end of a lesson there was a greater variety of ideas and language used than if the tutor had asked for individual responses. Sooner or later even the most reluctant student had to serve as spokesperson for a group. Because that student was expressing ideas the group had shared (and not necessarily having had to take on any other initiative other than summarizing the group’s points), they demonstrated more ease in speaking and greater use of the language taken from the workcards. Students who lacked confidence operated more naturally in a peer group and spoke with greater frequency and at greater length.

High performing language students turned out to be the most resistant to initiating group activity. This could be because they were not able they get the recognition they usually received or that they were now more closely connected to less able students, or that they felt as if working in group situations might impede the speed of their progress. CoRT tools were found to be a leveler in this regard.

The implementation of CoRT and cooperative learning depends on adaptations made to accommodate students’ needs and interests. The tutor modeled a brisk pace to ensure that the focus remained on the tool and not on the content. The implication is that whoever is leading the CoRT session needs to provide encouragement by listening to and accepting ideas in a positive way. To promote that sort of discussion, students needed a repertoire of replies that gave value to responses in the absence of right or wrong answers. Some of these included “that’s very interesting”, “that’s an original idea”, “that’s an important point”, “no one thought of that”, “I hadn’t considered that”, “that’s a useful idea”, or “you can piggyback on that idea”. There are other ready-made phrases available in the teacher handbooks that can be shared with student...
groups. It is important to provide support to the ideas and the way in which they are expressed. What was to be avoided was accepting certain ideas as the “correct” ideas while dismissing others.

At the beginning of the study, it appeared that the CoRT workcards might not be necessary for each student to have. However, in practice, they were needed for each individual to focus the student’s attention; they made the lesson more definite and concrete. Although students could often understand what a group said, they had no way of knowing what was going to be said next. With the workcards, students had everything that was needed and could look more easily at the basic nature of the lessons and its extent. The cover design helped to anchor the idea of the lesson and was often used to introduce a specific tool.

Conclusions

There are number of benefits from combining cooperative learning strategies with CoRT in the study. CoRT tools can be simply introduced and are adaptable to an ELT class environment; it takes 30-40 minutes to learn a tool and practise it. The nature of the tools is such that a number of cooperative learning strategies can be used to create learner groupings within a class with different purposes.

Using this combination, there is increased group interaction, particularly in speaking. The speaking has supports. Each group processes how they worked together based on what they learned from the tool, the five elements of cooperative learning, and from peer feedback. Use of the tools makes learning relevant to the student as they add their ideas from their own background and access their prior experience. In this way, CoRT can provide a low-risk environment for the sharing of ideas. For the tutor, the CoRT tool format is already established with minimal preparation needed. This allows the tutor to provide support and feedback for the groups as they work together and develop the use of cooperative strategies.

As there are no right and wrong answers in the CoRT sessions, there is a climate of confidence rather than of anxiety. Through the group work, students are given practice in observing their thinking plus the thinking of others in an objective way: the lessons have a positive effect on student behavior as their self-image is bolstered (e.g., “I am a thinker” versus “I am a language learner”). They interact in this environment with a sense of achievement. Adopting thinking tasks centered on cooperative learning strategies helps improve social relationships among team members, gives learners the opportunity to learn, practice and absorb the cooperative learning technique while at the same time using the target language.

Students used the tools as means to an end: to get on with the task and engage in using the thinking tool while simultaneously putting into practice the language that they had learned in class cooperatively. CoRT tools were an ideal vehicle to practice target language while engaged in cooperative learning.
In this research, most students did not realize that while working on the tools, they were in fact, practicing speaking and writing skills. One student’s response particularly summarized the value of combining CoRT tools with cooperative learning strategies: she had the ‘guts to share my thoughts and was more confident in my own judgment’.

About the author:

Canadian, Dr. John McKeown, has served as teacher, administrator, trainer and consultant in Canada, Angola, Turkey, UAE, Qatar and UK. He is a CELTA holder and experienced ESL teacher and ELT trainer. In Doha and Abu Dhabi, he was Director of Academics for Mosaica Education supporting government-sponsored education reform initiatives. He has taught in higher education in both Bahrain and Turkey. He holds an B.A.(Hons) in English and Philosophy and graduated from the University of Toronto with a B.Ed. and a M.A. His Ed.D. focused on building community through shared practice. He is currently piloting a new model to develop tutor intercultural competency, “educational cultural convergence” (“ECCO”). Dr. McKeown is an administrator at MEFIS International School - Istanbul.
References


Phonology and Applied Linguistics Meet in Teaching Listening

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Abstract:

This paper discusses connected speech as a listening problem in foreign language pedagogy. The paper presents linguistic phonological changes that are characteristic of connected speech, which make understanding more difficult, especially for learners of foreign languages. A comparison is drawn between the phonological changes in connected speech of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic (CEA) and American English language (AE), specifically the changes that occur within words and at word boundaries. This is in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the phonological processes employed by each language. The paper concludes with an approach to teaching listening that capitalizes on the conducted contrastive analysis. It is an approach that dwells upon processes of listening. The proposed approach, The Listening Skill and Comprehension Approach, focuses on both comprehension and skill. It trains language learners not only to construct meaning, but also to crack the code. The approach includes pedagogical listening tasks that offer solutions to language learners' problems in listening, some of which could be related to language transfer.

Keywords: Phonological changes, connected speech, listening pedagogy, listening tasks
1.0 Introduction

A given speech signal fails to follow the principle of linearity as it is established by the classic study of Chomsky and Miller (1963). The principle of linearity assumes that, for each phoneme, there must be a particular stretch of sound in the signal. In speech, properties of an acoustic signal of a phoneme overlap, co-occur and intermix so greatly with the acoustic properties of adjacent segments in the sound stream that definable portions of sound do not correspond to segments at the phoneme level (Delattre, Liberman, & Cooper, 1955; Liberman, Cooper, & Studdert-Kennedy, 1967; Liberman, Delattre, Cooper, & Gerstman, 1954; Studdert-Kennedy, 1976).

In short, there is a lack of correspondence between an acoustic signal (representing a sound) and a perceived phoneme, because phoneme boundaries disappear, that is, phonemes cannot be segmented into discrete units. For example, in a sequence of a consonant and a vowel like /di/ or /du/, the /d/ could not be isolated in the sequence and still be heard as /d/. In order to hear the /d/ as in /di/ or in /du/ the whole combination of the consonant and the following vowel must be present (Liberman et al., 1967; Liberman et al., 1954; Liberman, Harris, Hoffman, & Griffith, 1957; Mattingly, Liberman, Syrdal, & Halwes, 1971; Miller & Liberman, 1979). There is no better example of lack of linearity of a speech signal than connected or running speech. The language of connected speech undergoes a great deal of phonological modification and change. These changes take place within words and at word boundaries, i.e., between words. Some of these changes are assimilation, contraction, liaison and elision. They are referred to in the literature as “sandhi-variation,” and are defined as “the phonological modification of grammatical forms which have been juxtaposed” (Crystal, 1980: 311). Because of these modifications Gillian Brown (1990) refers to the incoming speech sounds, specifically those pertaining to connected spoken speech, as "acoustic blur," out of which the listener has to attempt to reconstruct what words the speaker actually intends and, hence; the meaning.

2.0 Connected speech and teaching listening

Researchers in language pedagogy contend that connected speech, or “real life” language, needs to be the focus of instruction. Listening texts and recordings ought to contain naturally occurring stretches of connected spoken language. Naturally occurring connected speech is characteristic of reduced forms, whose pronunciations differ considerably from the decontextualized units of language, as in isolated citations forms (Brown, 1990, 1995a, 1995b; Brown & Yule, 1983). Teaching based on conversational and discourse analysis usually emphasizes the natural way native speakers of a language speak.

Researchers agree that foreign language learners are faced with a daunting task when they listen to native speakers using naturally occurring connected speech (Brown & Yule, 1983; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Rost, 1990, 2002; Ur, 1984).

The difficulty is attributable to many factors. As mentioned, because phonological changes alter speech greatly, learners may fail to recognize words they have already learned because they are not familiar with the way the words sound in connected speech. Connected speech takes place in real time, hence; a learner does not have the time to search his or her memory for the meaning of words when processing connected speech. Besides, recognition of a word might be linked to learners’ particular knowledge of what the word looks like on paper, or what it sounds like in
citation forms (in isolation). In writing, there are spaces between words, however, in speech words run into one another with no spaces between them, which makes deciding where one word ends and another begins more difficult (Brown & Yule, 1983; Field, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Koster, 1987; Ur, 1984).

In my recent study Aquil (2012b) I discussed the problem of connected speech. In a study investigating the source of the problem, I found that learners were not able to recognize words that have undergone the phonological modification characteristic of connected speech. This was despite the fact that the learners knew the words in their citation forms.

2.1 Sandhi-variation connected speech

Sandhi-variations are the phonological modifications -- such as assimilation, contraction, liaison and elision -- that take place in connected speech. Since sandhi-variations is one factor that renders connected speech more difficult to understand for learners of foreign languages, researchers investigated its impact on language learning.

For example, Henrichsen (1984) investigated the effect of “sandhi-variation” on listening comprehension. He looked into the interaction between absence and presence of “sandhi-variation” and learners’ level of proficiency. The participants of his study were 65 college students of three distinct proficiency levels; a first group (low level group) whose mean score was 69.63 on the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), a second group (high group) whose mean score was 78.00 on the MTELP, and a third group (native speakers) taking courses in linguistics and TESL at Brigham Young University, Hawaii Campus. He adapted the instrument (Sandhi-Variation Exercise, SVE) from Bowen’s (Bowen, 1975, 1976, 1977a, 1977b) Integrative Grammar Test (IGT), which consisted of 50 taped sentences, all of which had some form of sandhi-variation, for example, the second word (usually a grammatical morpheme) was contracted, as shown in example (1).

1) a. who’d he been to see
   b. who’d he wanna see
   c. who’d he like to see

To examine the perceptual saliency of the contracted morpheme, Henrichsen prepared two forms of SVE, each containing 15 sentences, some of which contained sandhi-variation and others that did not (e.g. full non-contracted form vs. contracted from). Henrichsen asked his three groups to listen to the sentences and determine the second word and write it in its full form. All subjects took the two forms, and scores were calculated on the basis of the accuracy of the word. Results showed that native speakers’ performance was not affected by presence or absence of sandhi-variation, whereas foreign language learners’ performance was. Results also showed that foreign language learners’ proficiency level interacted with the presence and absence of sandhi-variation; high-level learners’ mean scores on sentences with sandhi-variation present were higher than those of low-level learners.

Likewise, the interaction between strong or weak syllables and stress was also investigated. Researchers attribute some English language learners' problems to perceiving weak syllables, which often contain a weak vowel, which in turn interferes with the recognition of these syllables (Bradford, 2000; Eastman, 1993).
For example, Eastman (1993) examined learners’ ability to recognize stressed syllables. Eastman argued that second language learners whose language is syllable-timed lack a strategy for dealing with unstressed syllables. He asked his non-native speakers to count the number of schwas in a short recorded selection. The learners recognized only 30% of the schwas, and on the second trial the percentage rose to only 50%. Eastman concluded that, in this study, the learners' attention was primarily given to word recognition and this hindered their ability to identify schwas, which often appeared in weak syllables or in function rather than content words.

2.2 Rate of speech

Researchers also investigated the rate of speech in connected speech. Rate of speech is the alternation that takes place in the articulation of speech in terms of how slow or fast it is delivered. These alternations modify and produce complex changes in the temporal properties of speech. Researchers found that rate of speech has an effect on the processing of different consonants (Miller, 1990).

Research that investigated the listening comprehension of compressed connected speech (faster rate of speech) found a relation between comprehension and language proficiency level (Conrad, 1989). Conrad asked her participants, who were native speakers, and high and medium high English as Second Language learners, to recall sentences that were compressed. The compression rate ranged from 40% to 90% compression of normal playing time. She found that overall recall of the time-compressed sentences decreased with decreasing proficiency in the language.

Noteworthy, native speakers of a language seldom find faster rate of speech a problem. On the contrary, they normally expect one another not to speak in a very slow rate of speech. For example, Buck (2001) found that English speakers normally speak at a rate of three words per second or 170 words a minute. He also affirmed that English native speakers’ could cope with even faster speed before their comprehension fails. However, this can hardly be generalizable to learners. Griffiths (1992) showed that the faster the speed, the more difficult it is for learners to understand.

To investigate rate of speech and recognition of spoken words, Zhao (1997) used the computer to slow down speech and to allow learners control over linguistic input and rate of speech. His study had four conditions (1) no repetition of the recording or adjustment of speech rate; (2) no repetition, with the option of adjusting speech rate; (3) the option of both speech rate adjustment and repetition of any part of the recording; and (4) no adjustment of the speech rate, with the option of repetition. The results showed learners’ comprehension was overwhelmingly higher when they were allowed to adjust the speech rate. Although this technique was helpful for recognizing words that were not recognizable in connected speech, it did so because it gave the learners the option to choose the slow speech. This in itself defeats the purpose of developing the necessary skills to cope with speech in real life, because learners in this exercise may always opt to slow the speed just to avoid dealing with rapid speech.

Additionally, the effect of pauses has also been investigated (Blau, 1990, 1991). In two experiments, she investigated the effect of pauses on listening comprehension. She found that, with almost all language proficiencies, pauses facilitated listening comprehension, as pauses made the rate of speech slower. However, she also found a relation between rate of speech and
learners’ conversational skills, where high proficiency learners performed better with input that had a rapid rate of speech.

From the above brief account of the literature and characteristics of naturally occurring connected speech, certain intriguing questions arise. Given these conditions and properties, how can learners of foreign languages comprehend connected speech and decode the linguistic units of a given signal? Should language instructors be aware of the phonological changes that occur in the connected speech of both the target language (TL) and the native language (NL), and accordingly draw the learners' attention to them? Should listening tasks take into consideration the characteristics of connected speech?

This paper answers the posed questions in the affirmative, and suggests that instructors need to know about the phonological changes that take place not only in the TL but also in the learners' NL. Learners do not need to study these changes, but it is strongly believed that they will benefit a lot if listening tasks and exercises are devised in such a way as to address the phonological changes that are different from the phonological changes that occur in the connected speech of the NL.

The following section is a summary of some of the phonological changes of American English and Arabic (Colloquial Egyptian) connected speech.

3.0 Contrastive analysis of phonological changes

Both Colloquial Egyptian Arabic (CEA) and American English (AE) employ certain phonological processes, such as vowel deletion and assimilation of consonants within and across word boundaries. I consider these processes as corresponding phonological changes. In addition to these phonological processes, there are changes that are language specific, i.e. non-corresponding phonological changes. In this section I discuss both kinds.

A note is warranted to the instructor that the aim is not to teach the learners linguistics, or spend learning hours on teaching the rules. The purpose is to let students be aware that phonological changes happen in the NL as well as in the TL. The other purpose is to draw the instructor's attention to some sources of confusion and problems, which could hinder learners' listening skill, as well as comprehension.

3.1 Corresponding changes

3.1.1 Assimilation in CEA and AE

In CEA the [l] of the definite article [ʔil] assimilates completely to the adjacent coronal segment of the neighboring word (Abu Salim, 1988). This assimilation takes place when two phonological words are concatenated in connected speech. The following example illustrates this point.

(1) a. ʔilbint ʔil sikirteera → ʔilbintsisikirteera
the girl the secretary
‘the secretary girl’

(1) b. huwwa ʔaal ʔinn ʔil dars → huwwa ʔaal ʔinnidars
‘he said that the lesson is difficult’

(2)  
   a.  *adsume → assume
   *adsist → assist
   *adsign → assign

   b.  *imperfect → imperfect
   *compel → compel

3.1.2 Palatalization in CEA and AE

In CEA, coronal stops palatalize. Watson (2002) classifies palatalization in CEA into two kinds: “weak palatalization” and “strong palatalization.” Weak palatalization is when the palatal feature is manifested as a secondary articulation, while the primary feature remains apical as in /t/ > [tʃ] and /d/ > [dʒ]. As for strong palatalization, it involves a switch in the place of articulation from apical to postalveolar, as in /t/ > [tʃ] and /d/ > [dʒ]. Palatalization in general is triggered by a following /y/, /i/, and /i:/, (adapted from Watson, 2002, p. 258).

(3) /nadya/ na[tʃ]ya ~ na[dʒ]ya Nadya [female name]
    /tiktib/ tik[tʃ]ib ~ tik[tʃ]ib she writes

Palatalization can occur within and across word boundaries. However, across word boundaries, palatalization occurs most frequently when triggered by a palatal glide, (adapted from Watson, 2002, p. 282).

(4) /na:mit yaʃni/ na:mi[tʃ] yaʃni ‘she went to sleep, I mean’
    /il-walad yiʔullik/ il-wala[dʒ] yiʔullik ‘the boy tells you fem.sing.’

As for palatalization in AE, it occurs within words and across word boundaries, as in the following examples (5a and 5b), (adapted from Zsiga, 2003, p. 282).

(5)  
   a.  habit → habi[tʃ]ual
       grade → gra[dʒ]ual

   b.  hit you → hi[tʃ] u
       did you → di[dʒ] u

3.1.3 Vowel deletion in CEA and AE

Vowel deletion in CEA takes place across two words. For example, in the following examples, the preposition [fi] gets connected to the neighboring phonological word.

(6)  
   a.  ?ana fi xidmitak → ?anaf xidmitak
       ‘I am at your service’

   b.  fi issinema → fissinema
       ‘in the movies’
In the examples, the vowel [i] in the preposition [fi. ‘in’] gets deleted and hence the stray [f] connects to the pronoun [ʔana ‘I’] as in (6a). As for (6b), the vowel [i] of the definite article [i[s]] is deleted. Vowel deletion in CEA occurs because CEA does not allow two consecutive open syllables.

One common rule of connected speech in American English is the deletion of unstressed reduced vowels (Bailey, 1978; Dalby, 1986; Zwicky, 1972). For example, Zwicky (1972) maintains that vowels are deleted when they are in an unstressed position.

(7) below → [blo]  
believe → [bliv]  
parade → [pred]

Unstressed reduced vowels also get deleted across word boundaries. Selkirk (1984) states that vowels in function words in their weak forms (i.e. unstressed and in connected speech) “are deleted and the surrounding consonants may also be modified or deleted because of the stressless status of the syllable” (1984: 335).

(8) can pile → [kən ~ ḳn ~ ḳm] → [km pail]  
need him → [ ɪm ~ ṃ] → [nid ṃ]

3.1.4 Consonant elision in CEA and overlap in AE

In CEA, an initial glottal stop /ʔ/ is elided or deleted when it is preceded by another word. Sometimes only the consonant is deleted (9a) and sometimes the following vowel is deleted as well (9b and c). The /h/ is also deleted when it is in the final position, as (9d) illustrates.

(9) a. titxul ʔil miina → titxulilmiina  
‘enter the port’  
b. da ʔinta → danta  
‘that’s you’  
c. ʔana ʔaxattu → ḳanaxattu  
‘I took it’  
d. nifrah biih baʔa → nifrahbiibaʔa  
we are happy for him at last  
‘expression: it is about time he got married’

In AE, alveolar stops are reduced or omitted when they occur between two consonants (Ladefoged, 2001). Ladefoged maintains that the /t/ in most people, and the /d/ in sand paper, appear as if they are deleted. He states, "the tongue tip gesture for the alveolar stop in ‘most people’ may not be omitted but is just not audible because it is completely overlapped by the following labial stop" (Ladefoged, 2001 : 59).

Acoustic evidence is provided by Zsiga (2003) where she investigated temporal overlap between two consonants. She collected 20 repetitions from four American English speaking subjects, 10 at a normal rate and 10 at a rapid rate, of pairs of words (e.g. bed pan, bed can, bed tan, bad pen, bad ten, bad click, bad pick, bad tick, bad kick). As observed, the first word ended in /d/ and the second began with /p/, /t/, or /k/ sounds. Zsiga found acoustic evidence (i.e. formant transitions) of overlap in the final /d/ before initial /p/, /t/, or /k/. She suggested the reason behind this finding is that the gestures (i.e. articulatory movements) involved in the second consonant begin before closure for the first consonant is reached.

3.2 Non-corresponding and language-specific changes
3.2.1 Emphasis spread in CEA

Emphasis (i.e. an emphatic sound) spreads across word boundaries. CEA and all Arabic dialects have emphatic consonants. These consonants are characterized acoustically with a low second formant frequency and articulatorily with the constriction in the pharyngeal cavity caused by the retraction of the tongue root (Broselow, 1979). The data in (10) are adapted from Broselow (1979)ii. This data illustrate how the presence or absence of emphatics distinguishes otherwise identical lexical items, as the minimal pairs in example (10) show.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(10)</th>
<th>baat</th>
<th>‘he spent the night’</th>
<th>BAAT</th>
<th>‘arm pit’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiin</td>
<td>‘figs’</td>
<td>TIIN</td>
<td>‘mud’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seef</td>
<td>‘sword’</td>
<td>SEEF</td>
<td>‘summer’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emphasis spreads in CEA as it is illustrated in (11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(11)</th>
<th>TAA.lib</th>
<th>a student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>TA.LA.BA</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>SAA.fi</td>
<td>clear, also a man's name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>SA.FAA?</td>
<td>clearness, also a man’s or a woman’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>RAA.gil</td>
<td>man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>RA.GAA?</td>
<td>Hope, also a woman’s name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in (11) illustrate the spread of emphatic consonants. In (11 a, c, and e) emphasis does not spread to the second syllable. However, in (11, b, d, and f) it does.

3.2.2 Flapping in English

American English has flaps as allophones of dental stops [t, d] intervocally. These are sounds made by the tip of the tongue first curled up and back. Then the tongue strikes the roof of the mouth in the post alveolar region as it returns to its a position behind the lower front teeth (Ladefoged, 2001 : 150). Flapping in American English, as observed by (Nespor & Vogel, 1986), is a rule that applies both within and across words. The following examples are adapted from (Nespor & Vogel, 1986, p. 46).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(12)</th>
<th>water</th>
<th>waterer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>capital</td>
<td>capiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>wait a minute</td>
<td>waira minit……..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>the white rabbit escaped from its cage.</td>
<td>rabir escaped……..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.3 Vowel reduction in English

As has been well established, in AE vowels undergo reduction if the vowel is in an unstressed syllable. For example, the vowel in the second syllable of the word “present” is reduced in the derived form “pres[ə]tation.” According to Selkirk (1984), the principle of rhythmic alternation is behind vowel reduction in American English. Selkirk calls it the monosyllabic destressing rule.

(13) a. állý (verb)
   pŏtáto
dévélop
āmérica

b. wĭscónsin
cõdition
índicative

c. ally (noun)
sátire
hárvard
âlabáma
cítátion

Monosyllabic distressing (V̆) stipulates that a syllable be demoted or destressed if it satisfies one of the three conditions: (i) it is not the main-stressed or secondarily stressed syllable, (ii), it is immediately followed by another stressed syllable or it is final, (iii) it consists of a CV and sometimes a CVC (Selkirk, 1984: 119). The data in (13a) illustrate cases that contain CV syllables, whereas data in (13b) show the ones that contain CVC. Examples in (13c) do not undergo monosyllabic destressing because the stipulated conditions are not met.

3.2.4 Phonological changes in CEA and AE connected speech

Phonological changes in connected speech also differ in these two languages. CEA resorts to vowel epenthesis or deletion, and consonant assimilation obeying syllable structure rules. AE, on the other hand, in order to respect stressed syllables, adopts more radical changes in its connected speech. As observed above, consonants are deleted, or overlapped, and vowels are deleted, which in turn changes completely the features of a syllable. See the examples in (14) which illustrate some changes that occur in CEA and AE respectively.

(14) a. CAE

   bint simi:na → bintis mi:na  girl fat ‘a fat girl’
   CVCC.CV.CVVCV       CVC.CV.CV.CV

b. AE

   what do you eat?
wʌt  du yu it →  wʌ  ʒˈæ  it
   CVC CV CV CV       CV CV VC
As observed in English, a great deal of compression takes place and syllables are sacrificed in the process. Although CEA allows vowel deletion as (14a) shows, consonants are not altered the way they are in AE.

### 3.2.5 Conclusion

Contrastive analysis shows that phonological changes in connected speech differ. English connected speech undergoes radical changes at the expense of syllables, which results in major phonetic alternations. CEA connected speech, on the other hand, resorts to minimal changes while respecting syllables structure rules and phonetic integrity as much as possible. The following table shows a sample of some of the phonological changes of connected speech that could pose problems to Arabic-speaking learners when they listen to English connected speech.

#### Table 1: A sample of phonological changes in English connected speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonological change</th>
<th>Consonant Assimilation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td>Occurs in prefixes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*adsume → assume;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*imperfect → imperfect</td>
<td>Attention must be drawn to the fact that assimilation is present in NL as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEA</td>
<td>Occurs to certain morphemes in certain environment, the definite article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?ilbintissikirteera → ?ilbintissikirteera)</td>
<td>However, the environment and grammatical category must be taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel deletion</td>
<td>Occurs when the syllable is unstressed below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEA</td>
<td>Occurs to obey syllable structure rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fi issinema → fissinema</td>
<td>Attention must be drawn to the fact that stress plays a role unlike the case in CEA, where the syllable does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant deletion</td>
<td>Occurs when alveolar stops occur between two consonants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEA</td>
<td>Occurs most of the time with glottal stops /ʔ/, and with /h/ to obey syllable structure rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?ana ?axattu → ?anaxattu</td>
<td>Attention must be drawn to the fact that consonants are deleted in CEA only to obey syllable structure rules. In fact, when there are a cluster of two consonants, a vowel is inserted and a consonant is not deleted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flapping in English</td>
<td>Occurs within and between words at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab World English Journal</td>
<td>Attention must be drawn to the fact that, to an Arabic-speaking ear, the consonant has</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
boundaries.
water → warer
wait a minute → waira minit

Vowel reduction
AE
Very specific to English. Unstressed vowels are reduced
presentation → pres[ə]tation

Requires drawing attention and practice.
Vowel reduction does not exist in CEA and could be a big problem in listening.

4.0 Pedagogical implications

For decades, language textbooks and instructors have focused on listening comprehension as an approach for teaching listening. This approach measures learners' achievement in terms of their ability to provide answers to questions about facts and details in a given recording. Only recently have educators found that, in order to enhance listening comprehension, importance should also be given to honing a learner's listening skill (Field, 2008). Only when the code of the connected speech is cracked, can decoding the message take place and, accordingly, meaning building can happen. In other words, in order for Arabic-speaking learners of English to improve their listening comprehension, their listening skill first needs to be practiced. In this section, I discuss some of the activities English language instructors in the Arab world can use in their listening lessons to improve the learners' listening skill in English. Some of the activities mentioned below are adapted from Field (2008).

Field's (2008) book on teaching listening is a great resource for instructors of listening in foreign and second language contexts. He describes the strengths and weaknesses of the Listening Comprehension Approach, and introduces the Process Approach, which incorporates the strengths of the Comprehension approach, but adds the focused practice to improve learners' listening skill; interested readers are referred to the book for further details. The approach discussed below, The Listening Skill and Comprehension Approach (LSCA), follows Field's (2008) Process Approach, however, with some modifications to suit teaching English as Foreign Language in the Arab world. For example, it includes the addition of an activity based on the contrastive analysis between AE and CEA syllable structure rules. Aquil (2012a) found that when learners were engaged in a variety of activities, they implicitly learned the rule that alveolar stops are reduced or omitted when they occur between two consonants (see section 3.1.4). In a study checking the auditory representation of English phrases by Arabic-speaking learners of English, I found that when learners carried out a translation task, followed by an elicited imitation task (repeating the phrase), writing and reading tasks, their output did not have the Arabic epenthetic vowel between consonant clusters although they were not instructed to leave it out. For example, an Arabic-speaking learner often pronounces a phrase like [hand book] with a vowel inserted between the first and second word, e.g., [handbook]. However, after having completed the tasks, without being told the purpose, the learners in a reading task read the phrases without adding the epenthetic vowel.

4.1 Listening Comprehension Approach (LCA)

Listening comprehension in language pedagogy has been defined as an active process of meaning construction by means of drawing on various information sources in order to interpret the intended meaning of a message (Faerch & Kasper, 1986). Basically, a certain theme runs through the literature in listening comprehension, namely, the distinction between what is called
top-down (knowledge-based), and bottom-up (data-driven) processing. The latter is thought to involve decoding speech signals, whereas the former is supposed to denote not just understanding the words, but also interpreting the speaker's intention and the wider context of a given communication.

As followed in the listening comprehension approach, an effective listening lesson is one that is divided into three stages: 1) pre-listening, 2) during listening, and 3) post-listening.

**Table 2: Pre listening LCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre- Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Pre-teach vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Discuss title and context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Discuss any visual media to help in activating schema and world knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: During listening in LCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Extensive listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Learners listen to the whole recording to get the gist, and ensure some familiarity with the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Learners answer general questions, such as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- How many speakers are there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Who are the speakers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- How does the speaker feel, is s/he happy, angry, disappointed, defiant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Intensive listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners listen again to the recording and answer detailed comprehension questions in multiple-choice, true/false, and open-ended formats. Most often these questions are on the details and facts in the recording.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Post listening in LCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the post listening stage the instructor usually:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Teaches new vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Analyzes language, for example asks why the speaker used the perfect present tense in such and such a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Has learners listen to the recording again, but pauses occasionally and asks learners to repeat what they hear.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language educators expressed some concerns with the LCA approach, in spite of the fact that the format described above has survived to date. Some of the concerns are the following:

1- Format is not flexible.
2- Sequence of activities can be highly predicable.
3- Activities do not motivate students.
4- Intensive listening phase does not include focused questions.
5- Emphasis on drawing learners' attention to grammatical forms makes listening lessons mere reinforcement of newly learned grammatical rules.
Therefore, language educators started to question the validity of the LCA, and researched linguistics and its subfields — such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and second language acquisition — to develop an approach that could improve listening skill along with comprehension.

4.2 Listening Skill and Comprehension Approach (LSCA)

Researchers not content with the LCA as a teaching approach conducted needs assessment and surveys among the learners to investigate the problems learners have in listening to the TL. Goh (1998) examined English Language learners' listening diaries. The learners were Chinese-speaking university students in Singapore. Goh found that learners often reported having problems with unfamiliar vocabulary and the blending and reduction of sounds. In a similar study, Goh (2000) found that, out of the 10 problems the learners have reported, five are connected to perceptual processing, i.e. lower level processing. Learners reported that they are:

1. unable to recognize words they know,
2. unable to chunk streams of speech,
3. missing the beginning of texts,
4. neglecting what follows when thinking about meaning,
5. concentrating too hard or being unable to concentrate. “Not recognizing words they know” is, in fact, the second most common problem reported by the learners in the study.

The listening skill and comprehension approach (LSCA) proposed here, follows the customary lesson plan of LCA. It divides a listening lesson into the same stages, pre-listening, during listening and post listening. However, it differs from LCA in that it provides the learners focused practice on form and meaning. For example, it incorporates exercises and tasks on phoneme, syllable identification (decoding tasks) and discrimination, and guided questions on meaning (meaning-building tasks). The instructor does not need to cover all the tasks in one listening lesson. What follows is just an exposition of a variety of activities focusing on listening as a skill. It is left to the needs of the class as to which ones to carry out. Note that most of the activities are learner-centered, unlike those in the LCA, which are teacher-centered.

**Table 5: Pre-Listening in LSCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Are pre-taught vocabulary that is critical; just 4 or 5 words that are essential and critical for understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Discuss title, context and what issues or details are likely to occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Take notice of visual media to help in activating schema and world knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Devise questions in anticipation of the information in the recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Reflect for two minutes what words may come in the recording.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: During Listening in LSCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Listening –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instill multiple listening steps, however, with a focused purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1- Same as in Extensive listening- Answer general questions. Learners:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Listen to the whole recording to get the gist and ensure some familiarity with the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Answer general questions, such as:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many speakers are there?
Who are the speakers?
How does the speaker feel, is s/he happy, angry, disappointed, defiant?

Step 2-
1- Listen to the recording again, teacher underlines on the board words previously brainstormed by learners in the pre-listening stage.
2- Listen again, learners underline on a sheet words and phrases they already know that came in the text.
3- Compare with their peers.

Step 3
1- Listen to a segment of the recording and complete an information gap task, compare with peers.
2- Listen to the segment again and check what they have written or filled, verify answers.

Step 4
1- Listen to the segment again and guess meaning from the context words and phrases written on a worksheet.
2- Compare with peers.

Table 7: Decoding the message: Exercises on the phoneme

During Listening
Phoneme discrimination
Instructor extracts some minimal pair words from the recording. Instructor asks Learners to:
1- Given a choice in writing, decide if they heard (A or B).
2- Transcribe one member of the minimal pairs (A or B)
3- Raise their left hand when a sound represented by a certain phoneme (e.g., /p/) or the right hand if they hear the phoneme (/b/). A modification is to ask learners to write the entire word.
4- Hear minimal pairs and, on a worksheet, see pairs of words, e.g., back/pack, bill/pill, bush/push and decide what they hear the instructor say.
5- Given a written choice, decide if they hear a reduced vowel or a full vowel.

Table 8: Decoding the message: Exercises on the syllable

During Listening
Exercises on the syllable
Instructor extracts some words of multiple syllables from the recording and asks Learners to:
1- Listen and write the syllables they hear.
2- Listen to words extracted from the recording that are on a worksheet. Learners identify the syllables that occur in more than one word. For example, consumption, Egyptian, somebody, reckon.
3- Write down new words (from a recording) that have consonant clusters that are not common in their NL. For example, prank, strip, slack.
4- Write down instructor's dictation of words of graded syllables. For example: A ray, pray, spray, sprain, strained.

5- Listen to extracts where the alveolar stop is deleted (hand book → hanbuk), on a worksheet. Learners decide on the translation in the NL. Learners listen again to the extracts, but this time in full sentences and are asked to repeat phrases. After that, learners are asked to listen and write the same extracts. Finally, learners are asked to read the same extracts from a transcript.
6- Learners detect strong salient syllables in a recording of a phrase or a sentence and write the words down. Instructor discusses and writes on board. Learners listen again, but this time add weak syllables in the vicinity. Class discussion follows, and learners listen with the help of a transcript.
7- Listen to words with strong syllables and guess what the word is: For example /twen/ for twenty, /brek/ for breakfast /heps/ for perhaps, /twiin/ for between.

Table 9: Decoding the message: Exercises on connected speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercises on connected speech</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Segmentation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor plays a sentence from a recording, or new recorded material from a connected speech stretch, and asks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Transcribe words they understand. Instructor replays, and learners add more words. Learners compare with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Fill in missing words. Instructor gives them a transcript in which words (content as well as function words) are missing, and learners are asked to fill them in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Listen to sentences whose transcript they have, and add the stress to the strong syllable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Hear a stretch of running speech and a sequence of unfamiliar words whose word boundaries are marked by the segmentation system used in English, which is mainly strong syllable followed by weak syllable. Learners attempt to write the words. Instructor replays and explains the difference in the segmentation procedure of TL compared to that in NL (based on the contrastive analysis; see sections 3.0, 3.1 and 3.2 above).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Listen to an extract beyond their level and focus on prefixes and suffixes. Instructor replays the recording, and learners transcribe only the words, which begin with prefixes and end with suffixes. Compare with peers. For example, premeditate, adhere, concede, endurable, smoker, modernize, mountainous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Listen to an extract (longer than a phrase or a sentence) in faint audio. Learners tune in on stressed syllables and write them down. A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
discussion follows. Learners listen again and write all other syllables in the vicinity. On the subsequent listening, learners put the stress on the syllables. A discussion follows. Learners listen again with the help of a transcript with the stressed syllables and reduced vowels marked.

Table 10: Meaning building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning building</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In addition to questions on facts and details that measure learners’ ability to report facts at a sentence level as expressed by the speaker, as followed in the LCA, LSCA adds questions that focus on the learners' ability to make connections between parts of the recording or what the speaker says and has said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Inference questions*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With this type of question, learners are trained to trace implicit connections between sentences and facts in the recording. One variation is to make learners listen to sentences and pause between them. During the pause learners discuss the connection between the sentences. The discussion can be either in NL or in TL, depending on the learners' proficiency in the TL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Backward and forward reference*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners are given worksheets with words and phrases extracted from the recording. They listen to some extracts of the recording and are asked to write R if the words or phrases refer back to something already mentioned, or N when they think it is a new subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Interpretation questions*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners interpret an utterance extracted from the recording as a whole by completing tasks such as the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Recognize the ultimate goal of the recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Recognize understatement and vague language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Recognize idiomatic language and metaphor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Locating main points*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Learners listen to a summary in simple language of the recording they are about to hear; a whole class discussion follows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Learners listen to the original recording, and each time they hear one of the main points being made, they write it down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Learners listen again to verify their choices and also write down two or three words that are in the vicinity of the main points previously written down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Learners listen again to verify, but the instructor pauses at the main point and asks learners what extra information they can add.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Identifying main points*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- On a given worksheet, learners have a list of main points to be made by the speaker in a recording. The points are not in the order in which they appear in the recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Learners number the points as they hear the speaker making the points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deep processing paraphrase
True/False updated
1- Learners check some statements against the information in the recording in the True/False format. However, the statements may not have the same order as in the recording and may not use the same words.
2- Learners are asked to mark the statements True if they think they are correct. If they think the statements are wrong, they mark them False and correct them. If the statements are not mentioned at all in the recording, they mark them with a question mark. A class discussion follows.

Paraphrase matching
1- Instructor extracts and re-records 10 sentences from the recording.
2- On a given worksheet are 10 sentences, some of which are a paraphrased version of the original sentences in the recording.
3- Learners read the sentences on the worksheet and make sure they fully understand each sentence. Then they listen to the extracted and pre-recorded sentences and decide whether the sentences they hear mean the same as the sentences they have read.

Table 11: Post listening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection and summary</th>
<th>Post listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In addition to the tasks in the listening comprehension, which are:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Teach new vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Analyze language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Have learners listen to the recording again, but pause occasionally and ask learners to repeat what they hear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proposed approach adds the following exercises and tasks:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Take selective notes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Mentally list main points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- List the recording's or speaker's main points and then decide which are of primary importance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- Write a summary, mention which points added to the learner's knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed, the LSCA combines message deciphering with meaning-building exercises. The format is flexible, unlike the format in the LCA. The sequence of the activities is not predictable the way it is within the LCA. This way, the learners are always motivated. The code cracking activity takes into consideration the potential of NL transfer and, accordingly, focuses the learners' practice on TL-specific connected speech phonological changes. The activities are learner-centered and devised according to their needs. Last, but not least, one of the ultimate goals of the approach is to equip the learner with strategies s/he can transfer to subsequent listening tasks. The LSCA gives the learners enough practice for them to acquire certain listening strategies transferable to a wide range of listening tasks.
5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen the extent to which listening comprehension of naturally occurring connected and running speech can be problematic. This is because of the features and characteristics of connected speech, for example, phonological changes. Discussed changes are assimilation, consonant deletion and contraction or overlap, vowel deletion and reduction, and fast delivery or speech. Pedagogical tasks pertaining to teaching listening need to consider these changes in order to improve learners’ listening skill. This, in turn, will enhance learners’ listening comprehension. It is very important to remember that learners may not be able to answer comprehension questions on a recording when the code of the message is indecipherable. Listening lesson plans need to take this into consideration, as this paper suggests and asserts.

About the author:

Rajaa Aquil, Assistant Professor of Arabic at Georgia Tech, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Her research and work is on psycholinguistics, specifically spoken languages. She published studies in the Perspectives or Arabic linguistics and in the Journal of Psycholinguistic research. In foreign language pedagogy, she focuses and works on L2 listening skill.
References


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[i] Note that the [s] is the outcome of the complete article assimilation as discussed earlier.

[ii] Capital letters are used to represent emphatic consonants, as in Broselow (1979).
Beginning Omani EFL Teachers’ Perspectives on the Challenges They Encounter

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Sultan Qaboos University

Fatma Al Hashmi
Sultan Qaboos University

Abstract

Teachers are of course key agents in all formal educational systems. If well-adjusted and well-prepared, they can motivate and inspire their students, while those facing challenges might find it difficult to teach effectively and so fail to achieve the goals set by the educational institution they work in. Research has found that novice teachers face many challenges, such as classroom management, lack of curricular freedom, unsupportive colleagues and unstimulating school environments (Goodwin, 2012). For new EFL teachers, these challenges might be very numerous indeed and the effect on their teaching serious. This study aims to reveal the problems encountered by novice English teachers in Oman’s Al Sharqia Region. The study sample included 40 participants (20 female and 20 male) who had taught no more than 5 years. Through a questionnaire, the study found three factors playing vital roles in either supporting or handicapping novice teachers. These come under school conditions, the students, and the teachers themselves. Workload requirements top the list of factors. Next comes large class sizes, novice teachers’ inability to deal with special needs students and student misbehaviour. And finally, beginning teachers appear unable to strike a balance between work requirements and their personal life. To support novice teachers and help them to satisfactorily carry out their career responsibilities, the study recommends that they be provided with emotional and task-based support programs upon joining schools.

Keywords: beginning teachers, novice EFL teachers, challenges, Omani EFL teachers
1. Introduction

Teaching is a demanding and complex profession. While it was generally viewed as an art until the 1940s (Berjandi & Hesari, 2010), it is now considered "an amalgamation of principles, processes, skills, strategies, behaviors, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes all of which could have great impacts on teaching and learning" (Berjandi & Hesari, p. 50). To do their work effectively, teachers must gain skills through experience as it is unlikely that pre-service training will equip them with the skills and knowledge to deal with every possible situation and challenge. Through experience, skills and processes get honed and teachers become wiser in dealing with the diverse problems around students, classroom management, the curriculum, assessment, and effective lesson delivery. Experience gives teachers confidence, flexibility and insight into what may work in different situations. New teachers by definition lack experience and must struggle to make their mark. They face challenges that might be serious obstacles preventing them from fulfilling their duties. For example, some students are passive learners due to their perception of the teacher as the only source of knowledge. Psychologically speaking, they lack motivation and interest in receiving knowledge. Students with little motivation are considered a challenge for beginning teachers as we find in Toren and Iliyan’s study (2007).

Secondly, some schools are poorly equipped with materials needed for establishing a successful educational environment. This too can negatively affect a novice instructor’s performance. Teachers enter the profession with an enthusiastic desire to teach and help, but with slight information on what exactly will be expected of them. Their heavy teaching loads should be supported by effective equipment and modern materials, which are sometimes lacking. Then also inexperienced teachers might not be adequately trained to design activities and assess their students' performance (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011). Ill-prepared for such tasks, they initially feel dissatisfied with their classes, a finding revealed in Sarwar, Aslam, and Rasheed’s study (2010). Adequate preparation is essential for running and organizing a classroom confidently. It involves not only making plans and stating objectives but also having a clear understanding of students' needs and individual differences.

From a different angle, some novice teachers enter the school situation with high expectations of themselves, their students (Batell, 2004), the principal, and colleagues. They forget, or disregard, the fact that "the transition from a student teacher to a teacher of students is a challenging and difficult journey that can take the novice through a whole odyssey of roller-coaster emotions, confusions, [and] frustrations" (Yuen-Fun, 2003, p.1). They might also think that their students will easily accept and respond to them, which might result in a "reality shock" when they see a mismatch between anticipation and actuality (Yuen-Fun, 2003; Yuen Fun, 2000; Farrell, 2008).

For new non-native EFL teachers, initial challenges might be exacerbated by a host of factors, including the foreign context, students' negative attitudes and low motivation, and an unsupportive school system. In Oman, this study's context, pre-service teachers have reported the following as challenges: student misbehaviour, poorly performing students with a tendency to use Arabic in class, mixed-level classes, uncooperative experienced colleagues, and their own lack of effective teaching strategies (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011). Do these challenges persist for new teachers? And if so, how do they affect them?
Again, in Omani schools, a lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure to support English teaching has also been a challenge. Research has found that although the Ministry of Education implemented the Basic Education system in 1998/1999 (so that English is taught from grade one) and has increased English instructional time, resources are still lacking (Moates, 2006). This certainly affects new teachers entering the system.

Because it is vital to support new EFL teachers in order to shield them from frustration and encourage them to continue in the profession, we must discover precisely what challenges they face and their opinions about how they might be met or removed. Hence, this study. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first of its kind conducted in Oman and for the sake of clarification, in this study, beginning or novice EFL teachers are seen here as those with no more than 5 years of teaching in Omani public schools. These were chosen because research has found a high attrition rate among teachers in their first five years of teaching (Anderson, 2008).

2. Literature Review

It should be no surprise that the initial year of teaching is tough. Moving from being a student to being a teacher is a very hard transition. It is often characterized as a “sink-or-swim” experience (Bartell, 2004). In short, it is a year that should be given intensive attention by schools, principals and even teachers themselves.

Because the very concept of effective teaching has changed, novice teachers will naturally face challenges in their initial year. Teachers nowadays are expected to meet the needs of all their students and to treat them all equally (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Also, they must be well-prepared, masters of their subject matter, aware of individual student differences, and skilled at dealing with their principal, colleagues, and parents. These requirements and challenges might well prevent novices from teaching well and, as several studies have shown, they are both numerous and varied. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) found that the most obvious to be “classroom management, motivation of students, dealing with the individual differences among students, assessing student work, and relations with parents” (p. 2). Hence, they focused on factors around students' psychological and academic demands and their connection with parents. Sarwar, Aslam and Rasheed (2010) mentioned "classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, evaluating students’ performance, and the lack of training” (p.3), adding that these are common challenges for both beginning university and school teachers. Lack of preparation, they said, can be a particularly formidable challenge that limits inexperienced teachers’ ability to complete the tasks assigned to them. For their part, Hover and Yeager (2004) highlighted

heavy teaching loads, multiple preparations, the least “desirable” classes, extracurricular duties, few instructional resources, little collegial support, discipline issues, professional isolation, high parent expectations, poor administrative support, unfamiliarity with routines and procedures, and a mismatch between their expectations of teaching and the realities of the classroom (p. 2)
That these problems can impede novice teachers’ ability to adjust and work well has serious implications for professional attrition and thus a tremendous loss of highly trained personnel. To guard against this, solutions have to be sought for the problems. However, before pinpointing solutions mentioned in the literature, it is useful to classify the problems more clearly.

In Toren and Iliyan’s (2007) categorization, based on problem importance, crucial are teachers’ personal problems, problems related to the school environment, and others related to student willingness to learn and participate. This suggests that there are merely three main problems. Though logical, this ignores other factors involved, such as, perhaps, inability to communicate effectively with colleagues, principals and parents.

Toren and Iliyan also rightly stress that teachers’ personal problems are multifaceted. As they say, most novices arrive with enthusiasm and in high spirits, unaware that "[their] personal life adjustment, [their] expectations and perceptions of teaching, the strains of daily interactions, and the teaching assignment itself" (Toren & Iliyan, 2007, p.1) might constitute serious obstacles. For example, beginning teachers are sometimes hired in areas far from their home and so are vulnerable to difficulties related to the host region’s culture. They may also experience severe homesickness, unless they are married and move with their families (Ibid). This is certainly the case in Oman.

Inadequate class preparation is another problem, even with highly motivate novices. If they are not experienced enough to design activities and assess their student’s performance, they may well feel dissatisfied with their first classes (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011). Such teachers need guidance in bringing what they have learned to real teaching situations. Professional training, as a matter of urgency, must equip new teachers with strategies for communication, course design and classroom management (Toren & Iliyan, 2007, Al-Mahrooqi, 2011), not to mention how to face heavy teaching loads.

Problems around school conditions and environments top the categorization list for Toren and Iliyan (2007). Some schools, they say, lack good equipment and modern apparatus, especially in the area of instructional media, which progressive-minded novices find very frustrating.

Not only can the classroom be a problematic site; a novice’s relationship and communication with colleagues can be difficult too. Because they are new and “alien”, they might not be involved in much communication with their colleagues and the principal (Sarwar, Aslam & Rasheed, 2010, p. 9), at a time when they badly need collegial support and an accepting leadership. "A supportive principal can play a key role in helping first-year teachers find a mentor teacher, take part in professional development, and make full use of planning time (Working with Principals: Advice for New Teachers, n.d)

Nor should student attitudes be underestimated. Inexperienced teachers often expect students to accept them immediately and feel deeply shocked when they are rejected, forgetting perhaps that students naturally differ in their way of thinking, perception and understanding, and that as beginners they are likely to be given those who are uninterested and disruptive. Research has found that pre-service Omani EFL teachers find negative student attitudes and misbehaviour a challenge (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011). Hence, it is important to investigate how EFL teachers'
performance is affected by bad behaviour: the record certainly shows that Omani EFL trainees find it very challenging indeed. But is this still true when they become full-time instructors?

It is of course the teacher’s task to create comfortable and interesting environments in which students feel at ease to question, participate, and problem solve. Collinson (1996) says, "Teachers can develop a sense of trust in students within the classroom by being fair, reasonable, respectful, and consistent" (p. 40). They should, he adds, establish their authority from the beginning, while strongly emphasizing their accessibility and liberality, so that students feel comfortable enough to make comments, discuss, and suggest their own ideas. Clearly, effective communication between teachers and students can only occur after creating trust, so that students will see their teacher as a tolerant and respectful friend rather than as a mere knowledge transmitter (Collinson, 1996). But how well equipped are new EFL teachers in this area and what challenges do they face?

Excessive parental expectation is yet another problem for new teachers because it places the onus squarely on their shoulders to guide children towards educational success. Parents, however, might well ignore their obligation to work cooperatively with teachers in a joint effort to secure successful academic outcomes (Collinson, 1996).

The above discussion unearths a host of factors affecting novice teachers’ performance and adjustment. It remains to be seen now if beginning EFL teachers in particular face these same challenges.

3. Description of the Context

English was important for Oman even before its renaissance in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said ascended the throne (Al-Busaidi, 1995), but after 1970 it assumed a new importance as an essential aid in the modernization of the country, the acquisition of science and technology, and in communication with the rest of the world (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2010). Initially, under what was called the General Education system, English was taught in schools from the fourth grade. During the academic year 1998/1999, however, it began to be taught from grade one in a new system called Basic Education, which was implemented experimentally in 17 schools (Ministry of Education, 2005). The first cohort to receive 12 years of English teaching under this system graduated in 2012. Oman’s EFL teachers are a multinational group, though locals now comprise the majority as graduates from Sultan Qaboos University, former Teacher Intermediate Colleges (now called Colleges of Applied Sciences), and other regional or international institutions. Due to the task’s demanding nature, these teachers face diverse problems, language loss among them. This can happen for several reasons, including a non-English speaking environment and extra-curricular workloads (Al-Mahrooqi & Sultana, 2012). Another problem is related to low student motivation and their negative attitudes towards English (Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010). Lack of resources is yet another challenge. Beginning Omani EFL teachers might experience these difficulties very acutely. Thus, because the government invests large sums in teacher training, and because the services of its teachers is urgently needed for schools to become self-sufficient and accumulate experience, it is important to smooth the path of new recruits by identifying and tackling the problems they will face. Hence the present study.
4. The study

The study was carried out in Oman’s Al Sharqiya Region. The reason for choosing this area is that it is around 250 km from Muscat, the capital, and thus is culturally conservative. This fact might affect attitudes towards English and those who teach it, and in turn might limit the amount of support teachers get from the parents, students, principals and the community. Across Oman in general, attitudes towards English range between being negative, mildly positive or very positive, though negative attitudes remain predominate (Al-Mahrooqi, Abrar-ul-Hassan, & Asante, 2012). Because teacher attrition is such a dangerous phenomenon in an evolving educational system like Oman’s, it is important to promote professional retention by investigating factors that could impede beginning teachers’ adjustment and well-being.

4.1. Participants:

The study involved English teachers from the Al Sharqiya Region, the sample including 42 participants, 20 female and 22 male. They taught in primary or secondary schools and their experience, as shown in Table (1), did not exceed five years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Instruments

Addressing the main purpose of the study, a questionnaire was designed to investigate problems facing novice English teachers. Selected problems related to the school, the teacher, and the students. More specifically, items were included that investigated the preparedness of schools, including their possession of good equipment, their location, and their provision of health and safety services. To accommodate the critical matter of a school either supporting or handicapping novice teachers, two sections of the questionnaire covered this. There were also items that investigated teachers’ personal problems, their relationships with colleagues and the administration, their training, and their ability to cope with practical problems. Two sections were involved here which distinguished between teachers’ personal concerns and their relationships within the school. The questionnaire finally sought to examine the effect of student attitudes on novice teachers, the latters’ ability to deal with special-needs and uninterested students, and their ability to manage misbehaviour. An open-ended question asked teachers to suggest how their problems might be solved.
4.3 Data Analysis and Discussion

This study asked the following two questions:
1. What are the main challenges facing Omani beginning English teachers in their first year of teaching?
2. What are some of the solutions that could lessen the impact of those challenges and support beginning teachers?

Using descriptive statistics such as means and percentages, quantitative data was analyzed. Statistics were calculated for all the questionnaire’s sections and subsections and the qualitative data was classified according to the proposed solutions.

The results indicated that workload problems topped the list, receiving an overall mean of 3.56, while problems arising from teachers' relationships with colleagues and administrators received the lowest mean (2.07). This clearly is a crucial finding.

Regarding schoolwork requirements, as shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents ranked item (2) as their major problem (mean = 3.88). Item (1) received a mean of 3.00 and item (3) a mean of 3.80, which highlights beginning teachers' incompetence in carrying out their duties and their poor self-management skills. A significant finding here is that three-quarters of those handicapped by their initial year teaching load blamed this on extra work unrelated to teaching English, such as organizing activities and workshops.

Table 2: Problems related the nature of work and its requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I could not manage administrative or extra work that was not directly related to teaching English.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I got bothered by the long hours of teaching.</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I was overwhelmed by the many responsibilities I had.</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average mean</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reflects respondents’ concern about class numbers, as they ranked item (2), receiving a mean of 3.4, as a crucial element in student-related problems. Clearly large numbers militate against effective classroom control and management. Such a situation denies equal opportunities for all students to participate, creating negative attitudes towards the teacher and possible misbehaviour - a difficult and stressful matter for new teachers.

Including special-needs students within normal classes, as shown by item (3), was also seen as problematic, receiving a mean score of 3.4. New teachers, noting that their training had not prepared them to deal with such cases effectively, felt in dire need of assistance from specialists. In addition, 50% of respondents appeared not to have been unduly frustrated by some students' misbehavior as represented by item (1), which received a mean score of 2.7. Thirty five per cent, however, responded positively to the statement “It was difficult to manage
students’ misbehaviour”, a challenge that needs to be addressed through the cooperation between teachers, parents and school administrators. This challenge is also faced by pre-service teachers as Al-Mahrooqi’s 2011 study revealed.

Table 3: Problems related to students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1. It was difficult to manage students’ misbehavior.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2. Having lots of students in one classroom put me under pressure.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3. I was struggling while teaching students with special needs.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average mean</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With a mean score of 2.7, item (1) shows that almost half of the participants were initially hired in schools far from home, which, as Table 4 reveals, created feelings of isolation from facilities, including health and safety services. Working in remote areas without such facilities might certainly affect a new teacher’s ability to carry out their duties effectively.

Table 4: Problems related to the school condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>N (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The school I was teaching in was far away from my hometown.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The village in which the school was located did not provide sufficient transportation.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The village in which the school was located did not have health and safety services.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>7.66</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows novice teachers as seriously concerned about personal problems. Many, for example, seem unable to strike a balance between work and their private life. This can be inferred from responses to item (1) (mean=2.8) and item (2) (mean= 2.6), which report almost half of the participants lacking this ability. This might be explained by their relative youth and immaturity on first appointment and, as Table 1 and Table 5 show, on being assigned to remote areas, having to leave their families – their most supportive network. This can cause not just personal discomfort but anxiety about their parents and siblings now far away.
Table 5: Problems related to the teacher’s personal life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>It was hard to balance work requirements and personal life.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I was always preoccupied with my family’s problems.</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I suffered from homesickness because of being far away from home.</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for teachers’ training and ability to prepare lessons, responses revealed that more than 30% of participants had concerns in this area too as shown in Table 6. Also, they were hampered by a lack of technology since their schools were ill-equipped, a predicament preventing creative and innovative teaching. Put simply, as item (2) (mean=2.6) shows, they could not convey their knowledge effectively. Further, one third of the participants were unable to manage their time well enough to find opportunities for lesson preparation. This was revealed by item (1) which received a mean score of 2.4.

Table 6: Problems related to curriculum and lesson planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I did not have enough time to prepare for lessons.</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>There were not sufficient technological devices to help me convey knowledge to students.</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average mean</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, respondents seemed, for the most part, to have good relationships with their colleagues and administrators. While a quarter felt unassisted by those already established in the profession, the majority (64%) found them supportive and cooperative, providing enough feedback to help them improve their performance. This was revealed by responses to item (3), which registered a 69% disagreement with the statement “In-service teachers did not evaluate my performance or give me feedback”. This suggests that beginning teachers’ relationship with their senior colleagues is not a challenge but an asset. By contrast, school principals did not appear so supportive since 33% of respondents agreed with the statement “The principal did not appreciate my hard work and effort”. There seems to be obvious room for improvement here since tense teacher-principal relationships are a known threat to a school’s good working atmosphere (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).
Table 7: Problems related to the teacher’s relationships with his/her colleagues and administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The principal did not appreciate my hard work and effort.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In-service teachers did not work cooperatively with me as a beginning teacher.</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In-service teachers did not evaluate my performance or give me feedback</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Possible solutions

The open-ended question mainly sought solutions to the problems of novice teachers. Participants all stressed the importance of collegial support in assessing and reinforcing their performance. More than ten teachers claimed they lacked this, even though they sincerely wanted to improve their performance. They also stressed a need for effective training in how to deal with students in different grades. In general, they said, their pre-service training had been more theoretical than practical, an observation echoing Al-Mahrooqi’s finding in 2011. It should come as no surprise that concern arose about students’ attitudes towards their teachers and the English language. Respondents said that “some students do not like English” and that “students are not motivated to learn the language”, claims also supported by previous research (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi et al, 2012). To improve student motivation it was suggested that the community and parents should cooperate with teachers in urging the importance of English for their children’s education and future employment.

The solutions offered echo those of Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000), which included programs providing emotional, personal, and task-focused support. Meanwhile, it is a duty of the schools and the Ministry of Education to establish support networks for all beginning teachers, and for English language teachers in particular because of hostile attitudes to their subject, especially in remote areas of the country. This will enhance the teaching quality of novices, contribute to their professional development, and ensure teacher retention.

5. Findings

Aiming to pinpoint the problems encountered by Omani novice English teachers, the study found that these were many and can be categorized as followed: work-related requirements, school conditions, teachers’ personal problems, and teachers’ relationships with colleagues and administrators. Excessive workloads constituted the hardest challenge, with their associated tasks of lesson preparation, demanding schedules, homework, and test marking. In terms of school conditions, participants expressed concern about a lack of modern equipment to help the learning process and facilitate new methods of teaching. Personal problems also loomed large, with participants incapable of striking a balance between work demands and personal responsibilities. More positively, however, a majority of participants had good inter-personal relations with their colleagues and worked cooperatively with them.
As for suggested solutions, respondents were clearly in need of urgent support to help them carry out their professional duties effectively. This related to discomfort with high stress levels experienced when working in new environments. More senior teachers can help with this by assuring their new colleagues that such an experience is normal and temporary.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Since work overload is a central problem, reducing the number of tasks assigned to novices would ease their way forward. And since leaving them with little or no support handicaps their adjustment and performance, school administrations should provide emotional and task-based support. Earlier studies have also offered solutions. For example, Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) suggested programs that they classify under the following headings:

6.1. Personal and emotional support

Since novice teachers feel stressed at the start of their career, their stress levels can be markedly reduced by supportive colleagues assuring them of the normality of such an experience - a point already mentioned above. Effective though this might be, beginning teachers still need the principal's backing to promote their adjustment and involvement in the school’s teaching culture (Stansbury and Zimmerman, 2000). Parental support can also be vital in cooperatively assisting teachers to observe and monitor students’ behaviour and performance.

6.2. Task-focused support

Some novice teachers suffer from poor training in how to tackle their first classes effectively. They are likely to think that "their work performance is deemed acceptable only if they teach well, as defined and laid down by result and performance expectations" (Yuen-Fun, 2000, p. 5). In this case, they merely need immersion in "induction programs" that can help them to "approach new tasks and [solve] specific problems that crop up in their teaching" (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000, p. 4). It is seasoned teachers' responsibility to support beginners in planning their teaching schedule and giving them necessary feedback. Programs of collegial collaboration can be established wherein a team of experienced teachers is assigned to help beginners with questions of overall structure and support for planning curricula and instruction (Ibid). Besides, school principals should provide novice appointees with materials appropriate for addressing students’ individual differences.

As this study was conducted to identify problems encountered by Omani beginning English teachers in the Al Sharqia Region, a more comprehensive study could investigate whether these same problems are common across other regions of the country.

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Arab World English Journal
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Appendix A

A questionnaire on the Problems Encountered by Omani Beginning Teachers

This study aims to identify the problems encountered by Omani beginning teachers. Kindly, fill in this questionnaire providing candid information. Please be assured that your answers will remain confidential and will only be used for research purpose.

Please, choose the answer that applies to you.

Background Information:
1. Gender: ☐ male ☐ female
2. Years of experience: 
3. School level/grades:

A: For every item, please tick in the column that best describes your response:
SD: Strongly Disagree,  D: Disagree,  N: Neutral,  A: Agree  SA: Strongly Agree

1. Problems related the nature of work and its requirements:
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Statement</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I could not manage administrative or extra work that was not directly related to teaching English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I got bothered by the long hours of teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I was overwhelmed by the many responsibilities I had.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Problems related to the teacher’s relationships with his/her colleagues and administration.
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Statement</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The principal did not appreciate my hard work and effort.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In-service teachers did not work cooperatively with me as a beginner.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In-service teachers did not evaluate my performance or give me feedback.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Problems related to students.
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**
     
     | The Statement                                                                 | SD | D | N | A | SA |
     |--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
     | 1. It was difficult to manage students’ misbehavior.                        |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 2. Having lots of students in one classroom put me under pressure.         |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 3. I was struggling while teaching students with special needs.             |    |   |   |   |    |

4. Problems related to the curriculum and lesson planning.
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**
     
     | The Statement                                                                 | SD | D | N | A | SA |
     |--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
     | 1. I did not have enough time to prepare lessons.                           |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 2. There were not sufficient technological devices to help me convey knowledge to students. |    |   |   |   |    |

5. Problems related to the teacher’s personal life.
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**
     
     | The Statement                                                                 | SD | D | N | A | SA |
     |--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
     | 1. It was hard to balance work requirements and my personal life.           |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 2. I was always preoccupied with my family’s problems.                     |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 3. I suffered from homesickness because of being far away from home.       |    |   |   |   |    |

6. Problems related to the school.
   - **As a beginning English language teacher,**
     
     | The Statement                                                                 | SD | D | N | A | SA |
     |--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
     | 1. The school I was teaching in was far away from my home town.             |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 2. The village in which the school was located did not provide sufficient transportation. |    |   |   |   |    |
     | 3. The village in which the school was located did not have health and safety services. |    |   |   |   |    |

**B:** Please suggest solutions that can lessen the impact of challenges facing novice teachers and suggest ways that can improve their adjustment and performance.

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The Acquisition of the Simple Past Tense in the Context of Arab Learners of English

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Bristol, United Kingdom

Abstract

Building on previous studies of cross-linguistic influence (CLI) of L1 on SLA, and principled criteria for confirming its existence in L2 data, an empirical study was run on 74 Arab learners of English (ALEs) divided into two groups of 37 students each. A detailed analysis was made of the simple past tense forms in 222 written texts produced by ALEs. Written texts were collected from each subject at 3 stages in the experiment (after 2 weeks, 2 months and 4 months). The analysis of the non-target-like forms indicated that interlanguage stages do not appear in isolation. Quantitative and qualitative analysis in addition to descriptive analysis indicated seven interlanguage stages that ALEs may go through in the acquisition of the simple past. The stages will be presented and detailed examples will be given of the way in which the non-target-like forms were categorized.

Key words: language acquisition, Interlanguage, crosslinguistic influence, and simple past
1. Introduction and hypotheses

The purpose of the study is to focus on the acquisition of the simple past tense in the context of ALEs and hopes to contribute to our knowledge in this area. Based on the shortcomings found in previous methods of teaching and following recent works in applied linguistics on form-focused instruction, explicit teaching and learning, and types of feedback, the author's hypothesis is that the acquisition of the simple past tense in English can be rapidly achieved by explicit grammar teaching which seems to be effective with both low and high level second language learners, and that drawing second language learners’ attention to their non-target-like simple past forms, focusing on form, and receiving metalinguistic feedback in a form of contrastive/error analysis, recasting or some form of corrective feedback, creates a space for interactions among interlocutors. This in turn leads to drawing the second language learners’ attention to the gap between the simple past forms they want to write and the forms they can actually write. This process, the author claims, results in second language learners progressing more rapidly through the interlanguage stages than those who are not exposed to such a process. Based on what is mentioned above, it is decided to select the topic of the study to investigate how ALEs acquire the simple past in English, to compare and contrast the current study with the previous studies in different contexts. Besides, I think that ALEs may have different interlanguage stages in acquiring the simple past. The related literature is presented in the following part.

2. Literature Review

First, it is worth mentioning that Arabic does not follow English grammatical structure. Mansourli (2005) refers to the difficulties in Arabic acquisition and its specific typology (p.118). This perception that verbal morphology may be complex gives the ALEs an impression about English grammar and motivates them to learn English grammar in a thorough way. This section consists of three sub-sections. First in 2.1, I will present the acquisition of the simple past. Then, in 2.2, I will present the development interlanguage stages in the acquisition of the simple past. Finally in 2.3, I will present ALEs and using regular and irregular simple past forms.

2.1 Acquiring the Simple Past Tense

Quirk, et al. (1985) point out that the simple past tense indicates that something happened at a specific moment in the past. In conformity with the simple present, the simple past contains three different meanings; the “event past”, the “state past”, and the “habitual past”. Referring to a single and specific action in the past is the “event past”. The “state past” is used when the meaning of the verb is a statement, while the “habitual past” concerns those verbs which refer to a repetition of an action (p.186).

On one hand, learning the past tense has been the subject of debate in cognitive science since Rumelhart and McClelland (1986) first modelled it as part of their parallel distributed processing effort. In the same vein, a number of researchers have contributed to the issue since, criticizing the original model (e.g. Pinker & Prince, 1988) or offering alternatives, either connectionist, such as: MacWhinney & Leinbach, 1991; Plunkett & Juola, 1999; Plunkett & Marchman, 1991,1993, or symbolic, such as: Ling & Marinov, 1993. A substantial amount of information has been gathered about the use of past tense verbal morphology in a variety of languages, such as:

In my point of view, forming the simple past in English is considered one of the most difficult problems facing ALEs while learning English grammar. Comparing Arabic with English, we find that Arabic does not have regular and irregular verbs, which causes a plethora of non-target-like forms produced by ALEs while acquiring the simple past in English. Brown (1998) claims that irregular verbs are more complicated and cause many difficulties for language learners, and many of them are still poor in understanding irregular forms even those in universities (p.142). Based on my experience in teaching ALEs for many years, it is concluded that the performance on the irregular verbs dipped after acquiring the –ed rule; this causes what is termed U-shaped behaviour. In other words, in the classroom context, students start to use the target-like forms of the irregular verbs, followed by overgeneralizing the –ed rule on the irregular verbs, due to shortage of knowledge or not receiving metalinguistic feedback, then they start to use the target-like form of the irregular verbs again. Another problem facing ALEs is the English verbs which can be regular and irregular at the same time, for example:

*Hang, hanged, hanged* (to kill or die, by dropping with a rope around the neck), and
*Hang, hung, hung* (to fix something –a picture- at the top so that the lower part is free)

### 2.2 Interlanguage Grammar Development and the Acquisition of the Simple Past Tense

In a well-known classification of verbs from a lexical point of view, Vendler (1967) proposed that verbs can be grouped into four types, according to their inherent aspect, examples after Salaberry (1999):

- **Statives** (e.g. to be, to have, to want)
- **Activities** (e.g. to run, to walk, to breathe)
- **Accomplishments** (e.g. to write a novel, to build a house)
- **Achievements** (e.g. to notice someone, to realize something, to reach the summit)

It is worth mentioning that the current study focuses on how simple past is acquired following picture-story writing in which ALEs use only activity verbs.

Previous literature on second language acquisition of the simple past tense in English suggests that the accuracy order of two simple past tense forms (irregular past tense and regular past tense) varied depending on how the data were collected. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) added that in the case of careful written production, the regular past tense was more accurate but in the case of spontaneous production it proved less accurate than the irregular form. This appears to concur with Ellis’ (1987) findings. In general the order of acquisition of different grammatical structures can vary according to the kind of task used to elicit samples of learner language, (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p.220).

Meisel (1987) and a number of researchers observed the developing ability to use language to locate events in past time. He mentions that second language learners from different first language backgrounds acquire the language for referring to past events in similar patterns. These patterns are described as follow:

Stage one, where learners with limited language use the base form or the simple present to show the event occurred in the past.  
*My son come. He work in a restaurant.*
Viet Nam. We work too hard.
Stage two, where learners start to attach a grammatical morpheme marking –ing for simple past tense.
Me working a long time. Now stop.
Stage three, where learners use irregular verbs before regular verbs.
We went to school every day. We spoke Spanish.
Stage four, where learners overgeneralize the regular –ed to irregular verbs, and use present perfect instead of simple past.
My sister caught a big fish.
She has lived here.

McDonough (2007) coded learners’ activity verbs in past time contexts in terms of their grammatical forms as simple past morphology supplied or absent. He classified the subjects' errors in the formation of simple past tense morphology as: overgeneralization, where learners overgeneralize regular past tense rule –ed to irregular verbs such as: telled, gived, writed as morphology supplied. Other past forms such as past progressive and past perfect were not included in the analysis, which was focused on the learners' production of simple past forms only. One of the results of McDonough’s (2007) study is that in all the groups of his study –no feedback group (student did not receive any type of feedback), clarification request group, and recast group (recast means a corrective reformulations of learners' utterances. It draws the learners' attention to the mismatches between input and output, that is, causes them to focus on form and induce noticing of the kinds of non-target-like forms) - tended to use simple present and base forms with their past time activity verbs and rarely produced progressive forms.

In a classroom setting study, Housen (1995) observed, over a three-year period, six learners of L2 English whose native language was French and Dutch. Housen’s results were mixed: the French learners were overall less proficient than the Dutch learners and never reached the stages where they could use past morphology productively. Transfer factors were also involved specifically in the case of the past/non-past distinction, where Dutch is closer to English. Collins (2002) shows that the first language can have influence on the acquisition of L2. He investigates the different English verb forms used by French speakers and observes that in places where English speakers would have used simple past, French speakers did sometimes use the present perfect or the past perfect instead of the simple past (p.85). In the context of Arab learners of English, learners will use was or were + root, simple past, agent, past participle or gerund. That is because in Arabic narrating stories, they use the verb َكَانْ “Kanna” before the stem, agent or other forms of the verb. َكَانْ “Kanna” in Arabic equals was, were in English. In the current study, I do not investigate the lexical aspect of the verbs produced by the subjects of the study as most verbs produced were activities verbs. In the following, I will talk about ALEs and using regular and irregular simple past tense forms.

2.3 Arab Learners learning and using Regular and Irregular Simple Past Forms

Previous works on the acquisition of the simple past tense in English as an L1 have noted that irregular simple past forms are acquired before regular simple past forms. Brown (1973) presents the following order of language acquisition:
- Present progressive –ing (Mommy running)
- Plural –s (Two books)
Previous studies have investigated the difficulties learners face in learning English simple past forms. McDonald and Roussel (2010) examined whether problems with English regular and irregular past tense are related to poor L2 phonological ability and lexical access. They conclude that non-syntactic processing difficulties can have a specific impact on morphosynatctic performances in both non-native and native English speakers.

Ramadani (2009) discovered that the most common error students make in using simple past tense is with the structure of question sentences in the simple past tense where the use of regular or irregular verbs generate a different meaning. He also noted that remembering the irregular past tense form is another problem.

Andersson (2008) investigates what types of errors the students make regarding time and tense in Sweden and, secondly, compares the types of errors made with the results found from 1995 in To Err Is Human (Kohlmyr, 2003). The result shows that most errors occurred in the present tense. As many as 117 errors were found in the present tense whereas 80 errors were found in the past tense, and 66 errors were found in the future tense. The errors made in the past tense are categorized into four groups, namely, the simple past, the present perfect, the past perfect, and the past passive. She found that out of the 80 errors found in the past tense, 50 per cent occurred with the simple past tense. She concludes that the school must start to teach grammar explicitly in order to give the students the chance to use the language in a target-like way in communication.

Previous research studies suggest that beginners level can correctly use irregular verbs, while intermediate level students start using regular and irregular verbs to some extent of target-likeness; at upper intermediate level, students start using both forms in a target-like way, and gradually they master the regular and irregular forms not only in simple past forms but in other aspects in the target language as well. These stages can represent the stages of Interlanguage development on the one hand and the stages of developing the internalised grammatical system on the other in relation to acquiring the simple past tense in English. In the following, I will present the research subjects, the research question and the methods used, followed by the criteria used in discussing the written samples.

3. Methods

3.1 The Research Subjects

Two classes were selected from a total of 12 classes enrolled in grade 12. The target location was in one of the Omani government secondary schools (High School). Each group consisted of 37 Arab Learners of English ALEs (the total is 74 students), with ages ranging between 16 and 18. They are pre-intermediate to intermediate level in English. The subjects were all Arabic speakers and had been learning English as a foreign language for eight years attending 4 to 5 sessions per
week on average. Their studies were based on the course book entitled “Our World Through English” OWTE course book.

3.2 The research question

Based on the literature review and the research objectives, the present study addresses the following question:

How Arab Learners of English acquire the simple past tense, and which interlanguage stages can be found in the classroom context? to investigate the crosslinguistic influence of L1 on the acquisition of L2 structure, specifically, the acquisition of the simple past. However, L1 is different form L2.

3.3 Methods assigned to research question

The methods assigned for the research question is as follow: the simple past forms in three texts written near the beginning, middle and end of the teaching period were extracted from the samples and analyzed. The first written texts (B) were collected after the initial two weeks; the second written texts (M) were collected after the first two months and the third written texts (F) were collected at the end of the experiment. The experiment covered a total of four months. All the simple past forms produced by ALEs in the three chronological writings were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, on the basis of which it was possible to propose the interlanguage grammar development stages that ALEs go through in the acquisition of the simple past tense, albeit over a fairly short time-scale.

After presenting what has been suggested by previous research on the acquisition of the simple past forms, the present study aims, firstly, to test Meisel’s (1987) sequential stages established in naturalistic situations against the empirical data collected in classroom contexts. I am using picture stories as part of the investigation to gauge to what extent they hold true of ALEs at pre-intermediate and intermediate stage. In the following part, I will discuss the criteria used in categorizing interlanguage development in the acquisition of the simple past tense by ALEs.

3. 4 The criteria used in discussing the written samples

Each occurrence of a simple past tense form in the students’ written samples was carefully counted and analyzed. Intuition has been used to allocate examples to different categories. It is noticed that learners use different forms, for example: using run instead of ran, and using thanks instead of "thanked". With respect to the distinction between types and tokens in calculating the rates of development in L2 learners' simple past forms, even though goed or wented are non-target-like forms, they show some kind of development in a student’s interlanguage grammar. Each form produced by the subjects is discussed and analyzed for the purpose of this study.

In the following section I will trace the Participants’ Target-like and Non-target-like Regular and Irregular Simple Past Forms during the Experiment, as evidenced in the three written samples produced by the learners.
4. Analysis

4.1 Tracing the Participants’ Target-like and Non-target-like Regular and Irregular Simple Past Forms during the Experiment

In response to research question, participants’ target-like and non-target-like regular and irregular simple past forms were noted. The learners’ development in their use of the regular and irregular simple past tense forms was traced in three different written texts produced by the participants in both groups. The total number of the collected texts was 222. The abbreviations used in the tables and graphs are presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1 shows the raw and relative percentages of the target-like and non-target-like regular and irregular simple past tense forms in the three written texts produced by ALEs in the both groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Regular simple past</th>
<th>Irregular simple past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target-like Non-target-like</td>
<td>Target-like Non-target-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>123 (56%) 98 (44%)</td>
<td>173 (57%) 131 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>130 (58%) 93 (42%)</td>
<td>212 (62%) 130 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF</td>
<td>209 (92%) 17 (8%)</td>
<td>320 (92%) 26 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB</td>
<td>66(32%) 141 (68%)</td>
<td>138 (41%) 199 (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM</td>
<td>80 (43%) 107 (57%)</td>
<td>159 (51%) 154 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF</td>
<td>147 (76%) 47 (24%)</td>
<td>218 (69%) 96 (31%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first part (AB, AM, and AF) in Table 1 represents the Experimental Group. It shows that the participants used a number of 123 (56%) target-like regular simple past forms in the first writing text. And the number of the target-like regular simple past increased in the second writing text. They used a number of 130 (58%) target-like regular simple past forms while the number increased to 209 (92%) target-like regular simple past forms. In the final piece of writing, the percentage of non-target-like forms reduced from 44% to 8% over the end of the course.

Table 1 also shows that the participants in the Experimental Group used a number of 173 (57%) target-like irregular simple past forms in the first writing text. And the number of the target-like irregular simple past increased in the second writing text. They used a number of 212 (62%) target-like irregular simple past forms while the number increased to 320 (92%) target-like irregular simple past forms. The participants in the Experimental Group produced 131 (43%) non-target-like irregular simple past forms in the first writing text and the number reduced to 130 (38%) non-target-like irregular simple past forms while the number reduced to 26 (8%) non-target-like irregular simple past forms.

The second part (BB, BM, and BF) in Table 1 represents the Control Group. It shows that the participants used 66 (32%) target-like regular simple past forms in the first writing text. The proportion of target-like regular simple past forms increased in the second writing text to 80 (43%) and to 147 (76%) in the third piece of writing. The participants produced 141 (68%) non-target-like regular simple past forms in the first writing text but the number reduced in the
second piece to 107 (57%) non-target-like regular simple past forms and to 47 (24%) non-target-like regular simple past forms in the final piece of writing.

Table 1 also indicates that the participants in the Control Group used a proportion of 138 (41%) target-like irregular simple past forms in the first writing text, but the number of target-like irregular simple past forms increased in the second writing text to 159 (51%) and to 218 (69%) in the final piece of writing. The participants in the Control Group produced 199 (59%) non-target-like irregular simple past forms in the first writing text reducing to 154 (49%) in the second piece of writing and to 96 (31%) in the final piece of writing. The results of the experiment for both Experimental and Control Groups show an increase in production of target-like simple past forms usage. The table indicates: the Experimental Group's target-like regular simple past forms usage increases from 123 (56%) to 130 (58%) to 209 (92%), while the target-like irregular simple past forms usage grows from 173 (57%) to 212 (62%) to 320 (92%). The table indicates also: the Control Group's target-like regular simple past forms usage increases from 66 (32%) to 80 (43%) to 147 (76%), while the target-like irregular simple past forms usage grows from 138 (41%) to 159 (51%) to 218 (69%).

In general, some of the learners used compensation strategies-guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in speaking and writing- which enabled them to use the language despite their often large gaps in L2 knowledge. They might be aware that the two languages are different while they perform the task. Although they know such differences, they think that they perform the task properly by transferring or borrowing from the L1 to the L2. They also generalize some of the L2 grammar to form the simple past tense in other verbs. It is found that they commit a plethora of errors while speaking and writing English, that is because the fact is that Arabic differs from English. The researcher believes that these mistakes can be reduced by the teacher's interactions with learners and his/her instructions as well. This might give a space for L2 learners to revise and redraft their writing after receiving metalinguistic feedback by analyzing their errors/mistakes and realizing the nature of these errors/ mistakes. This may guide L2 learners to notice the non-target-like forms they produce and provide them with explicit knowledge which enables them to produce target-like forms instead of the non-target-like forms and improve their written accuracy as a result of developing their internalized grammar system.

4.2 Interlanguage stages in acquiring the simple past forms in English in the context of Arab Learners

The data is presented from the most to the least commonly occurring non-target-like forms. Percentages given in brackets show the proportion of non-target-like forms attributable to the subjects’ production of simple past forms respectively at each of the three writing stages, B, M and F.

Most non-target-like forms in the data could be categorized into seven basic types which are illustrated below, from the most frequent to the least frequent.

4.2.1 Stage One

The most frequent non-target-like form overall (in productions B, M and F) was the use of the root or the simple present tense form instead of the simple past tense form; students produced 689 non-target-like forms which represents 69.5% of the total number of non-target-like forms, (e.g. go, come, stay, calls, and help). Table 2 below shows the proportion of forms which represents stage one in the interlanguage development in the acquisition of the simple past tense.
Table 2: The use of the root or simple present form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Non-target-like simple past forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>328 (47.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>296 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>65 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the most commonly occurring non-target-like forms in ALEs interlanguage development. Second language learners use mainly the root and the simple present tense forms instead of using the simple past tense forms. This supports of Meisel (1987)’s findings. Meisel noted that language learners from different first language backgrounds acquire the language for referring to the simple past tense events in similar patterns. The first stage in the current study also supports Andersson’s (2008) research. Andersson (2008) gives two explanations as to why the simple past is replaced by the simple present tense: first, the fact that the students do not master the inflection of irregular verbs, second, the fact that the students used the Swedish equivalent, so called transfer error (p.19). It is worth mentioning that the same type of errors and the same discussion occurred in Kohlmyr's study (2003, p. 272). In my opinion one more explanation of why the root or the simple present were used instead of the simple past tense form by the L2 learners may be that they have not yet recognized how to use the simple past forms which needs more time practicing, negotiating, and interacting using the target-like forms of the simple past. While some of them might need to pay more attention to the instructions given, and others need continuous metalinguistic feedback.

4.2.2 Stage Two

The second most frequent inaccuracy was the use of the target-like spoken forms but in non-target-like written forms; students produced 111 non-target-like forms which represents 11.2% of the total number of non-target-like forms, (e.g. brook, wint, hapeend, trayed, and colled). Table 3 below shows the proportion of forms which represents the interlanguage development in stage two.

Table 3: Misspelt forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>47 (42.3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>37 (33.3 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>27 (24.3 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays the second most frequent non-target-like form in the categorization of ALEs interlanguage development, so-called misspelt forms. This means that second language learners use target-like spoken forms of the simple past tense but they spell the verb forms incorrectly. This stage includes the performance errors produced by the second language learners while acquiring the simple past in English. This type of mistake can be classified as a "one-off" slip rather than a mistake forming part of the second language learners' internal grammar of the language. Although this type occurs in all stages, it is categorized as stage two as the
proportional data derived from all non-target-like simple past tense forms produced by all the
subjects show that it was far more common than other types of mistakes.
It is worth mentioning that misspelling of this type might happen due to the differences between
the Arabic language and English language in the pronunciation of each letter; silent letters in
English (which are not found in the Arabic language) and pronunciation differences between L1
and L2. In general, in learning the Arabic language, learners write what they pronounce with
diacritics, while in learning English; learners do not usually pronounce every written letters. For
example in Arabic: the words (MEN), (MAAN), (MOON), (MANNA), are all spelled with only
two consonants: M and N, but the Arabic diacritics which is put on each of the two letters
changes the meaning of the word: e.g.

MEN means (from),
MAAN means (who),
MON means (give as a gift),
MANNA means (gave as a gift).

In standard Arabic, each word is written as it is pronounced. Hence, this can be one source of
misforming/disforming the simple past tense in English. The author can claim here that
pronunciation is one of the clear differences between Arabic and English; it is a different
orthography, which makes it more difficult for ALEs to spell the simple past tense forms in a
target-like way.

4.2.3 Stage three

The third most frequent non-target-like form was to over-generalize the –ed rule of regular
simple past tense form to the irregular simple past tense forms; students produced 63 non-target-
like forms which represents 6.4% of non-target- like usage, (e.g. caught, gived, taked, comed,
and leaved). Table 4 below shows the proportion of forms produced by the ALEs in the
acquisition of the simple past tense which represents stage F.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>9 (14 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>19 (30 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>35 (56 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 displays the third most frequent non-target-like form in the categorization of ALEs
interlanguage development in the acquisition of simple past tense. Language learners
occasionally over-generalize the regular –ed to the irregular simple past forms. It is noticed from
table 4 above that there is a huge difference between the proportions of the non-target-like
simple past related to this stage in the acquisition of the simple past tense. This type of error is
classified as occurring at stage four in the study conducted by Meisel (1987), where learners
overgeneralize the regular –ed to irregular verbs, and the present perfect instead of the simple
past tense.
4.2.4 Stage Four

The fourth most frequent non-target-like form was to use the verb to be + the simple past tense forms or agent or the past participle forms or the gerund; the students produced 51 non-target-like forms which is 5.1% of the total number of non-target-like forms, (e.g. were wanted, was came, was went, was started, was broke, were became, and is happening). Table 5 below shows the proportion of the forms representing stage four.

**Table 5: Using verb to be + the simple past/past participle or agent or gerund**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>40 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>8  (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3   (6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 displays the fourth most frequent non-target like form in the categorization of ALEs interlanguage development in the acquisition of the simple past tense. Second language learners use the auxiliary verb to be in conjunction with the simple past tense form and sometimes with the past participle or the gerund form, even though they have not studied the simple past passive or progressive yet. In my opinion this happens due to transfer from the subjects' L1, the equivalent of which is كَانَ kana. This verb form is used to describe and narrate events which have happened in the past (see the different ways of describing the past tense in Arabic and how ALEs transfer from L1 to L2 in different ways. This might be considered to constitute a case of negative transfer). This is defined as crosslinguistic influence of L1 on the acquisition of L2.

Andersson (2008) explains why the progressive form was used as a substitution of the simple past in the Swedish context (p.20). She explains that the students do not master how or when to use the progressive form and that they use the progressive form whenever they want. It is also worth mentioning that the same phenomenon was found in Kohlmyr's study (2003, p. 279-280) of Swedish 16-year-old learners of English. This can be evidence of the similarities between Arab learners of English and European learners of English. It is noticed that ALEs use the progressive forms as a substitution for the simple past tense forms.

4.2.5 Stage Five

The fifth most frequent non-target-like form resulted from the errors in number concord, using was and were alternatively in a non-target-like way; students produced 49 non-target-like forms which is 5% of the total number of non-target-like forms, (e.g. they was, he were, she were, the woman were, and the driver were). Table 6 below shows the proportion of the forms representing the lack of appropriate number and person concord. It is worth pointing out that these forms are not considered errors in using/acquiring the simple past, but mistakes in agreement in number and person. These mistakes could be corrected when L2 learners’ attention is drawn to it through metalinguistic feedback provided by the teacher. These simple past tense forms have been categorized in the interlanguage development stages as “Number/person concord” for the
purpose of the study, one of which is to find out how to improve language learners’ written accuracy.

**Table 6: Number/person concord of was/were**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>22 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>17 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 above displays the fifth most frequent non-target-like form in the categorization of ALEs interlanguage development in the acquisition of the simple past tense. Second language learners misselect the target-like verb. Some of them use was for the plural, and others use were for singular (e.g. the driver and the woman was... the girl were...... Laila and Mona was......).

4.2.6 Stage Six

The sixth most frequent non-target-like form was to use blended forms. These were of two types: the first type of blended forms is using the infinitive to + the simple past tense forms or the past participle forms, while the second type of blended forms is using "have" or "has" + the simple past tense forms or the past participle forms; students produced 22 non-target-like forms which is 2.2% of the total number of non-target-like forms, type one: (e.g. to went, to called, to moved, and to seen) and type two: (e.g. has went, have helped, and has arrived).

Lightbown and Spada (2006) mention that a number of studies show that many errors can be explained better in terms of learners’ developing knowledge of the structure of the target language rather than in terms of an attempt to transfer patterns of their first language (p.79). Their view seems to be contradicted by the blended forms produced by the ALEs, illustrated in the sixth category described below. Table 7 below shows the proportion of the forms representing the first type of the blended forms.

**Table 7: Using to + the simple past tense forms or the past participle forms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>9 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 above shows the first type of blended form produced by the subjects in the experiment. The learners used to + the simple past tense or the past participle, e.g. to visited, to came, to ran, and to called. It is likely that this is again transfer from Arabic, where the equivalent of to ان “ann”, is commonly used in narrating stories.
For example: ﻋﺎﺩ ﺍﻟﻲ ﺍﻟﻤﻨﺰﻝ ﺳﻌﻴﺪﺍ ﺑﻌﺪ ﺃﻥ ﺫﻫﺐ ﺃﺣﻤﺪ ﺍﻟﻲ ﺍﻟﺴﻮﻕ

*After to went Ahmed to the market came back to home happy.
After Ahmed went to the market, he came back home happy.

This is again an instance of negative transfer and, though these forms were infrequent, their existence undermines a strong form of the argument presented by Lightbown and Spada (2006). Another type of blended forms includes the use have or has + the simple past tense forms or the past participle forms. Table 8 below shows the proportion of the forms used by ALEs representing the second type of the blended forms.

Table 8: Using have or has + the simple past tense forms or the past participle forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>0 (00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 (00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 above shows the second type of the blended forms produced by subjects in the experiment.

In an early interlanguage stage students use the blended forms. ALEs use have or has + the past participle or the simple past tense forms instead of the simple past tense forms although they had not yet been presented with the present perfect or the past passive. One explanation for this phenomenon, as previously mentioned, may be that they may have read or learnt these forms somewhere else. To find out if this was the case, I checked their school course book and found that they had studied the present perfect tense form in the first four units in semester one. This was then followed by studying present and past progressive in the second semester. I think that producing the present perfect as a substitution for the simple past tense forms at this stage can be evidence for the overgeneralization of the category of present perfect on the simple past tense forms and more than likely due to transfer from Arabic as it occurs in the German context in learning English, Andersson (2008). The author can claim that this overgeneralization has a relationship with L1 because Arabic has only three fixed tense forms in which learners use a fixed form for each tense – each form must match with the subject used with the target tense-present, past, and future, and there is no present perfect in Arabic language (e.g. 1-present: يكتب - يكتوب = he writes, 2-past: كتب = he wrote, 3-future: سيعكتب = he will write.). Though Arabic has no has/have + past participle form (which students might transfer), students might think that there is only ONE form for the past (based on their experience of Arabic) and, having learnt the present perfect, assume that that is the only way that the past is expressed in English.

4.2.7 Stage Seven

The seventh most frequent non-target-like form was to over-generalize a sub-rule of the irregular simple past tense forms to other irregular simple past tense verbs; students produced 3 non-target-like forms which represent 0.03% of the total number of non-target-like forms, (e.g.
Table 9 below shows the proportion of the forms representing the least frequent non-target like form in the acquisition of the simple past tense forms.

**Table 9: Over-generalizing a sub-rule of irregular simple past**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>0 (00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 (00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 above displays the least frequent non-target-like form in the categorization of ALEs interlanguage development in the acquisition of the simple past tense forms. Second language learners very rarely overgeneralize a sub-rule of the irregular simple past to other simple past verbs. This provides very limited support for a U-shaped learning model of second language acquisition, at least amongst ALEs at the pre-intermediate/intermediate level.

5. Discussion

As is shown above, some interlanguage forms which appear in the current study are similar to those found in other studies investigating the stages undergone in the acquisition of the simple past tense in English, and thereby support these findings. Yet, other studies do not match with, or support, the current study's findings. In other words, some interlanguage phenomena found in the current study are not found in other studies, such as type four where Arab learners of English use the verb to be + the simple past tense form, agent, or the past participle, or the gerund, taking into account that they have not studied the simple past passive or present perfect. I think this happens due to the use of "kana" in Arabic to describe and narrate past events.

The current study reveals that negative transfer does occur from Arabic to English due to the differences between the languages. The analysis of the learners’ non-target-like forms reveals that 11.2% of the non-target-like forms resulted from the differences in pronunciation between L1 and L2. The analysis also reveals that 5.1% of the non-target-like forms were produced due to L1 interference (using verb to be + simple past tense form), and also 2.2% of the non-target-like forms were due the L1 negative transfer (using to + simple past tense forms) and also due to the L2 negative transfer (using have, has + simple past tense forms).

Another difference between the current study and other studies in categorizing the interlanguage phenomena which arise in the acquisition of the simple past forms is using blended forms, i.e. using infinitive to + the simple past tense form or the past participle by ALEs. This related specifically to Arab learners of English, because the equivalent of to is also used in narrating stories in Arabic. Based on the above, the influence of L1 can be noticed in acquiring L2 specifically during the acquisition of the simple past tense in English.

It is worth mentioning that categorizing the interlanguage stages followed by ALEs in their acquisition of the simple past tense does not mean that these stages appear in isolation. It is difficult to identify a clear cut-off point between each stage and another. It can be claimed that they are all related to each other. It can only be gauged in a statistical way: there is proportionately more of one type than another as they go along. In other words, ALEs do not leave one stage behind when they enter another stage. Sometimes advanced learners slip back to an earlier stage. Lightbown and Spada (2006) mention that the progress achieved by second
language learners to a higher stage in interlanguage does not always mean that learners produce fewer errors (p.93). Overgeneralization of the regular \(-\text{ed}\) form to irregular forms is a case in point. This is progress by comparison with simply producing the uninflected base form – and students might be praised for having the right idea but alerted to the fact that, in this case, the verb is irregular so their hypothesis (based on a number of regular verbs) does not apply.

In spite of the great variety in the subjects' L1 and other studies with different language backgrounds with regard to acquiring the simple past tense in English, the similarities of the earliest interlanguage stages of second language acquisition were clearly found. By evaluating the interlanguage grammar development stages in the acquisition of the simple past tense in the ALEs’ context mentioned above, the similarities between the interlanguage features which appear in these studies and my own, are numerous. It is also noticed that the differences which occur might be due to the nature of Arabic grammar and its influence in SLA as is previously explained.

6. Conclusion

As a result of the analyses and the discussion presented above, it is concluded that the interlanguage stages cannot be separated, they do not appear in isolation, and they are connected with each other. The linguistic data received from the teacher - the first input - worked in the learners' mind and their internalized grammar began to develop. The learners then attempted to produce the language narrating the picture-story with some or many non-target-like forms. Students were exposed to further input - intake - and then they attempted to produce the target-like forms based on the metalinguistic feedback received. The analysis of the data suggested that ALEs go through seven interlanguage stages in the acquisition of the simple past tense forms. These are listed below but they are not necessarily in sequential order; there is a great deal of fluctuation in learner behaviour which makes it difficult to establish an implicational hierarchy:

The students’ non-target-like forms were categorized into seven types as follows:

1- Use the root or the simple present forms
   (E.g. go, come, stay, calls, help)
2- Use spoken target-like forms but written non-target-like written forms
   (E.g. brook, wint, hapeend, trayed, colled)
3- Overgeneralizing the \(-\text{ed}\) to irregular verbs
   (E.g. caughted, gived, taked, comed, leaved)
4- Use verb to Be + the simple past, agent, the past participle or the gerund etc.
   (E.g. were wanted, was came, was started, was broke, were became, is happening)
5- Number concord errors in the target-like verb forms
   (E.g. they was, he were, she were, the woman were, the driver were)
6- Use blended forms
   A- Use have, has + the simple past or the past participle
      (E.g. has went, have helped, has arrived)
   B- Use infinitive to + the past simple or the past participle
      (E.g. to went, to called, to moved, to seen)
7- Overgeneralizing a sub-rule of irregular simple past on other irregular simple past or regular simple past
The results of the current study provide evidence that second language learners of English generally acquire/learn the irregular simple past tense forms before the regular simple past tense forms. This occurs despite the fact that in their "first" learning of the simple past (as they were already pre-intermediate to intermediate students when they began the course), teachers expected to teach the “regular” formation in the presentation of the simple past tense.

About the author:

Anwar Mourssi has more than 20 years experience in TEFL/TESL in many different countries. Following his M.A. in TESOL from the University of Birmingham 2006, he took up positions in the Ministry of Higher Education and Hawthorn Muscat in Oman as a lecturer of Language Acquisition, Error recognition, and ELT methods. He is currently preparing for his final PhD viva in August 2012, at the University of the West of England, Bristol, UK.
References


Appendix

The abbreviations used in the tables and graphs

AB: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Experimental Group (the first writing after the first two weeks following the IWP).

AM: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Experimental Group (the second writing after the first two months following the IWP).

AF: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Experimental Group (the third and the last writing at the end of the experiment after spending four months).

BB: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Control Group (the first writing after the first two weeks).

BM: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Control Group (the second writing after the first two months).

BF: Tracing the target-like and non-target-like simple past forms used by the samples of the study in the Control Group (the third and the last writing at the end of the experiment after spending four months).
Shell Nouns on the Move: Expert and L2 Student Abstracts in Applied Linguistics

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Abstract

Shell nouns perform rhetorical functions of encapsulating propositions in text, reiterating the encapsulated propositions, and signaling macro-textual structures, which enhances overall coherence of texts. The aim of the study is to describe distribution and rhetorical functions of shell nouns in abstracts of research articles in applied linguistics. Two corpora were compiled from 20 journal abstracts of experts and 20 proceedings abstracts of L2 students. To analyze shell nouns from a macro-textual perspective, all abstracts were tagged with moves of communicative acts (Background-Purpose-Method-Results-Conclusion of studies). Results indicated the experts frequently used eight shell nouns (result, effect, change, type, task, finding, method, measure). They used these shell nouns more frequently with rhetorical functions of signaling moves and reiterating the encapsulated propositions across moves, as compared to L2 students.

Keywords: expert abstracts, L2 student abstracts, rhetorical moves, shell nouns
Introduction

An abstract should feature a brief overview of a research article (RA) by highlighting the design and significance of the study, so as to facilitate readers’ evaluation of the study quality (Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2000). This evaluation may affect whether readers will continue reading if they have not perused the RA, or to what extent they consider an abstract rhetorically effective in outlining the RA after perusing (Cremmins, 1982). An abstract is expected to have a clear information structure presenting the background, purposes, methodology, results, and conclusions of a given study (Lau, 2004).

The information structure of an abstract has been systematically “move-analyzed” in the field of English for academic purposes (EAP) (Dos Santos, 1996; Lau, 2004; Pho, 2008). “Move” in an abstract is analyzed as a segmented act that fulfills a communicative purpose deemed conventional in the genre of RA abstracts (e.g., stating research purposes or results) (Dos Santos, 1996; Swales, 1990). When moves of an abstract are clearly identified, they are applied to improve the writing of second language (L2) students (Hyland, 2000). A successful application is in Swales and Feak’s (2004) textbook for L2 RA writing which contains a move structure of an abstract, Background-Aim-Method-Result-Conclusion.

Recent developments of move-structure research have led to an increasing interest in how move structures are realized linguistically so as to contribute to the overall coherence of an abstract (Hancioglu, 2009; Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Pho, 2008). When we attempt to explore key features contributing to the overall coherence of abstract, shell nouns may be one of great importance. Shell nouns are well-recognized as effective in linking propositions in texts (Flowerdew, 2003, 2006; Francis, 1986; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Schmid, 2000). However, shell nouns in the move structure of abstract have received little research attention. Shell nouns are unspecified nouns (e.g., effect and type) with no specific meanings by themselves. Their meanings emerge from contexts (Schmid, 2000), as shown by the noun problem in the following example: “Incoherence had been found as one of the major problems in Taiwanese EFL learners’ written products.”

Specifically, shell nouns perform crucial rhetorical functions, including “encapsulating” propositions that spread over discourse (Sinclair, 1992), reiterating the encapsulated propositions, and signaling macro-structure of texts. This in turn organizes text as a cohesive unit with ideas developed coherently (Charles, 2003; Flowerdew, 2003). These functions of shell nouns are well-recognized in the literature, albeit a few analogous terms are used, including anaphoric nouns (Francis, 1986), carrier nouns (Ivanic, 1991), labels (Francis, 1994), and signaling nouns (Flowerdew, 2003, 2006). Despite these diverse terms, shell nouns are handy devices to link propositions for the overall coherence of texts (Flowerdew, 2003; Francis, 1986).

Although shell nouns are handy in building the overall coherence of an abstract by signaling move structure, fewer studies explore this issue. This study seeks to describe the distribution and rhetorical functions of shell nouns in move structure in abstracts written by experts and L2 students in applied linguistics. The study will explore how efficient use of shell nouns can coherently connect propositions against the backdrop of move structure, achieving coherence in abstracts.
Research Framework

**Analysis of Moves in Abstracts of Research Articles**

Writing an abstract often poses serious problems for L2 students because its genre role requires a minimum use of words but comprehensive coverage of RA contents (Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2000; Lau, 2004). How this genre role of abstracts is skillfully fulfilled in expert works has been schematically analyzed in varying move structures, including Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (Swales, 1990), Background-Aim-Method-Product-Conclusion (Hyland, 2000), and Background-Aim-Method-Results-Conclusion (Swales & Feak, 2004). The last structure, proposed in a textbook for L2 RAs writing, is commonly applied in the field (Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Lau, 2004), because its move labels directly outline communicative purposes of RAs. Extending from the move structure, recent research focuses on how moves are realized linguistically to identify discourse structure and functions typical of RA abstracts (Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Hancioglu, 2009).

More specifically, Hsieh and Liou (2008) targeted journal abstracts in applied linguistics to present lexico-grammatical patterns in move structure, including *the goal of the study is* in the Purpose move; *the results showed that* in the Result move; and *findings of the study indicated*, in the Conclusion move. Similar lexico-grammatical patterns were presented by Hancioglu (2009) from abstracts in the fields of Arts, Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities and Architecture, including *the goal of this study is* in the Purpose move; *the analyses suggest that* in the Result move; and *findings demonstrate evidence* in the Conclusion move. These patterns were then introduced to L2 students as a tool kit for efficiently constructing the move structure in abstracts (Hancioglu, 2009; Hsieh & Liou, 2008).

While some evidence has emerged on how moves can be clearly articulated by particular lexico-grammatical patterns in abstracts (Hancioglu, 2009; Hsieh & Liou, 2008), rhetorical functions of the patterns seem inadequately analyzed. Further analysis may reveal these rhetorical functions in signaling propositions in abstracts, which thus becomes one of the research aims in the present study.

**Analysis of Shell Nouns**

From the cognitive and functional perspectives, the lexico-grammatical patterns (e.g., *the goal of this study is*; *results showed that*) are formulated by core nouns, such as *goal, result*. Nouns like these are termed “shell nouns” by Schmid (1999), and their rhetorical functions are systematically described with examples taken from a 225-million-word English corpus. This corpus was composed of two thirds of the media texts with spoken and written data (e.g., *The Times*, tabloids, and transcripts of BBC broadcasts) (Schmid, 2000). These media-based texts constituted a sizable corpus with substantial examples of shell nouns to present a relatively reliable link between corpus, linguistic system, and cognition (Schmid, 2000).

Shell nouns are defined as inherently carrying semantic gaps that should be filled by contents of the shell nouns in adjoined co-texts so as to realize the nouns’ meanings (Charles, 2003; Schmid, 2000). Such contents are termed “shell contents” (Schmid, 2000, p. 21). Semantic maps are filled by shell contents in the preceding text via anaphoric reference, and by shell contents in the following text via cataphoric reference. Yet, some semantic gaps can
hardly be bridged by textual contents, and require world-based knowledge of readers via exophoric reference. Nouns with such gaps contribute less to textual cohesion; they are not categorized as shell nouns (Aktas & Cortes, 2008; Schmid, 2000). An example is displayed in the term “Task-based Approach”: “The study found that the Task-based Approach worked well in terms of equipping the subjects with knowledge of audience awareness.” Here task and approach are not shell nouns, because realizing their meanings requires exophoric references to additional discipline-specific knowledge beyond the text. As Schmid (2000) systematically defines shell nouns by availability of their in-text co-references, the study adopts this definition.

Rhetorical functions of shell nouns fall into three categories: characterization, temporary concept-formation, and linking (Schmid, 2000). Drawing on these three categories, the study elaborates on shell noun use with examples extracted from the corpora collected for the present study. Semantically, characterization refers to the function of characterizing complex chunks of information, usually achieved by use of phrases, longer clauses or texts. In Example 1, the first type conveys the focus of the study (i.e., the rhetorical organization category), and it further encapsulates this focus by supplying sub-categories of type at the in-clause level. Similarly, in Example 2, effect characterizes the major design of the study.

(1) Based on a small scale study it reveals two major types of rhetorical organization, here called the IMRD type and the CARS type. When thematic analysis, in terms of thematic progression and method of thematic development, is applied to the two types of structure…. (EAC 14, EAC 14 is abbreviated from Abstract 14 in Expert Abstract Corpus we collected. This abbreviation rule applies afterwards.)

(2) The study investigates effects of exposure frequency and contextual situations on EFL students’ vocabulary acquisition. (SAC 6. SAC 6 is abbreviated from Abstract 6 in Student Abstract Corpus.)

Cognitively, temporary concept-formation inserts complex information into temporary nominal concepts by repeating a shell noun in texts. Again in Example 1, as the first type encapsulates the purpose of the study, reiterating the second type can remind readers of the encapsulated proposition. This reiteration of type at the across-clause level enables readers to easily retrieve the above-mentioned proposition. Textually, the function of linking is to connect a set of nominal concepts in text. In Example 3, results fulfills the linking function by signaling a causal relation between the study outcomes and the study design construed earlier. Results can hardly be interpreted correctly unless readers referred back to the study design. Finally, as shown in Example 1 where the semantic and cognitive functions concur, the three functions of shell nouns may operate simultaneously (Schmid, 2000).

(3) These preliminary results demonstrate how a learner corpus can provide valuable information about learners’ interlanguage. (SAC 7)

Following this research vein, a burgeoning amount of research has advanced our understanding on the cohesive effects that shell nouns produce for connecting propositions in academic discourse (Aktas & Cortes, 2008; Charles, 2003, 2007; Flowerdew, 2006). Targeting theses of English-native speakers in politics and material science, Charles detailed uses of shell nouns in two patterns: “this +N” (2003) linking to preceding messages, and “N+ that” (2007) linking to
forthcoming messages. She argues that using shell nouns skillfully helps thesis writers display a discipline-specific style in thesis (e.g., by projecting a proper stance). Targeting L2 student argumentative essays, Flowerdew (2006) identified four types of errors in shell nouns, including incorrect use, no use, and collocation and colligation errors. He also described a tendency that an increasing number of errors, resulted in a lower essay score. Flowerdew (2010) further compared L2 student essays with L1 writers’, revealing that L2 students use fewer shell nouns regarding frequency and variety. Targeting RAs of experts and L2 students spanning six disciplines, Aktas and Cortes (2008) indicate L2 students extensively used the characterization and linking functions of shell nouns, yet they less frequently used the temporary concept-formation function for consolidating key concepts. This underuse suggests that L2 students’ ability to convey this function of shell nouns is relatively underdeveloped. Pedagogically, Aktas and Cortes (2008) suggested that future studies perform “deeper text analysis” on experts’ distinctive use of the function (p.13).

The deeper text analysis on shell nouns can target a discipline, to reflect word-choices or rhetoric-styles typical of the discipline. The analysis can also target a particular RA section, regarding cross-sectional variations in rhetorical functions (e.g., abstracts outline studies; introductions provide study rationales) (Hyland, 2000; Kanoksilapatham, 2011). Two recent studies show such analysis on shell nouns in the literature reviews of PhD theses: Thompson (2009) in Agricultural Botany and Economics, Food Science and Technology, and Psychology, and Flowerdew and Forest (2009) in Applied Linguistics. Thompson (2009) identified how thesis writers used evidence, problem, and model to voice their opinions on the current knowledge base. Flowerdew and Forest (2009) described how research, study, and studies rhetorically interact with the move structure. With a similar interest in the interaction of shell nouns and move structure in the introductions of research articles, Kanoksilapatham (2011) targeted the published journal articles in civil engineering. She then proposed a shell-noun-based linguistic device that is commonly used to articulate study purposes; namely, the objective/purpose/aim(s) + of the/this +research/paper/experiment/study+ is/are/was/were.

Abstracts can be another target for analysis because they function as an RA miniature expected to encapsulate RA essence (i.e., the design and significance) (Hancioglu, 2009; Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Lau, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2004). This encapsulation should be densely informative given tight constraints of word-length in abstracts (Lau, 2004). Rhetorically, this requirement for dense encapsulation may entail shell nouns as effective ties of propositions in abstracts. The dense encapsulation is often achieved by shell nouns laden with both immediate in-clause contents and cross-clause ones. Accordingly, the dense encapsulation in abstracts seems satisfied rhetorically.

Through a disciplinary-specific lens, the study seeks to scrutinize the distribution and rhetorical functions of shell nouns in the move structure in abstracts of the experts and L2 students in applied linguistics. Research questions are raised below:

1. Do shell nouns occur in the Student Abstract Corpus as frequently as those in the Expert Abstract Corpus? Which shell nouns have high-frequency in the Expert Abstract Corpus?

2. What is the distribution of the most frequent shell nouns across moves in abstracts?
Method

Corpus

Two corpora were compiled from journal articles of experts and from proceedings articles of L2 students in applied linguistics. The Expert Abstract Corpus (the EAC), totaling 3,223 words, was compiled from twenty journal abstracts published from 1998 to 2004 (See Appendix A). These abstracts were from six journals, including CALICO Journal, English for Specific Purposes, Language Learning, Modern Language Journal, Studies in Second Language Acquisition, and TESOL Quarterly. The journals were chosen for their prestige in the field. The L2 Student Abstract Corpus (the SAC), totaling 4,039 words, was compiled from twenty abstracts published from 2007 to 2008(See Appendix B). These abstracts were from the proceedings of an English-teaching-association annual conference in an Asian country. Once submitted abstracts were accepted by the conference, the proceedings published both the abstracts and entire RAs. In the proceedings, abstracts of L2 graduate students (master’s and doctoral students) were randomly selected for the study. The status of the student abstracts was verified by Google-searching the affiliation information the writers provided. Only when the information was confirmed, would the abstracts be included.

Although we regarded journal and proceedings abstracts as comparable, one may argue that the two are not the same genre given different discourse effects they produce in their readers and writers. Classified by discourse effects, abstracts generally fall into two types: reader-based and writer-based. The reader-based type implies that the quality of abstracts has profounder impacts on its readers (Swales & Feak, 2004). A journal abstract is categorized as the reader-based type, because its quality may affect whether readers will peruse the entire study, while it seems less influential to its writers. Meanwhile, the writer-based type produces more effects on its writers. A conference abstract is characteristic of the writer-based type because its quality will determine whether the writers can earn a ticket to the conference presentation (Swales & Feak, 2000). While this two-type distinction exists, it is not uncommon for abstracts to fall along continuum of the two extremes. For instance, the proceedings abstracts we used seem a hybrid type, producing effects on both writers and readers. It is undeniable that the proceedings abstracts will affect their writers in winning chances for conference presentation. Such proceedings abstracts also affect their readers in deciding whether to peruse the RAs after skimming the abstracts. Thus, the proceedings abstracts are deemed comparable to the journal abstracts.

Move Tagging

As shown in Table 1, a coding scheme (adopted from Swales & Feak, 2004) was employed to tag moves with different communicative purposes in the abstracts. The moves included the purposes of providing background or literature review (B), indicating purposes or tasks of the study (P), describing methods or theories (M), reporting results (R), and making conclusions and evaluations (C).
Table 1. Coding Scheme of Moves in Abstracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moves/sections</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background information; literature review</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial or complete conclusions, evaluation (including value)</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the coding scheme, two doctoral students in the field of applied linguistics were recruited to assign move tags to the abstracts. First, the two coders categorized varying communicative purposes in an abstract into potential moves (i.e., a move may spread over a sentence or sentences). The coders then carefully reviewed word choices and other signals in each potential move before finalizing the tag. The first coder move-tagged the entire dataset. The second coder tagged 24 abstracts (12 in each corpus), which accounted for 60 per cent of the two corpora. The inter-rater reliability reached .96. Besides move tagging, another major concern was move structure, which shows how varying moves are sequentially structured to articulate the overall rhetoric of the genre. Table 1 presents the move structure of the corpora. A great majority of the abstracts were found to have four different moves (80 per cent in the EAC, 95 in the SAC), except for four expert abstracts and one student abstract having only three moves.

Target Shell Nouns

There were 39 shell nouns analyzed in the study (see Table 2). The shell nouns were taken from Hinkel’s (2004, p. 284) complete classification of 34 “high-prevalent” shell nouns in academic writing (i.e., Aktas & Cortes (2008) adopted Hinkel’s classification for shell noun analysis as well). Some of these 34 items did not occur in the two corpora, so they were not listed in Table 2. These items included fact, manner, event, trend, tendency, class, phase, topic, circumstance, subject, and facet. In addition to Hinkel’s classification, there were five additional nouns taken from Schmid’s (2000) classification, including effect, finding, measure, aim, and goal. These five nouns are frequently used for describing features of studies in abstracts (Hancioglu, 2009; Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Pho, 2008). “Effect” is a typical expression for study interventions. “Finding” is commonly used in stating study outcomes at the general level, compared to the specific level expressed by result already incorporated in Hinkel’s. “Measure” commonly denotes study measurement, and “aim” and “goal” indicate study purposes. These 39 shell nouns are deemed representative of the rhetoric of abstracts.

Data Analysis

Both concordance and manual analysis were used in identifying shell nouns in the two corpora. The freeware concordancer Antconc. 3.2 was employed to concordance each potential shell noun. Then, each potential shell noun was manually reviewed.
The manual review on shell noun occurrences was conducted by an operational definition that characterizes a shell noun as capable of creating anaphoric or cataphoric references to encapsulate the preceding or following textual contents into the noun. However, nouns creating exophoric references to real-world or discipline-specific knowledge were excluded from the analysis (i.e., in “the Task-based Approach,” task and approach are excluded). Nouns with such exophoric references contributed less to textual development, compared to the ones with anaphoric or cataphoric references (Schmid, 2000).

To ensure reliability of the shell noun identification, the same two coders who had conducted move tagging worked independently. The first coder analyzed the complete dataset, while the second coder analyzed 60 per cent of the corpora (i.e., 12 abstracts in each corpus). The inter-coder reliability reached .95.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Shell Nouns in the EAC and the SAC

Table 2 presents the overall distribution of 39 shell nouns in the two corpora. Among the 39 shell nouns, 28 shell nouns occur either in the EAC or the SAC, while 11 shell nouns occur in neither corpus. These 11 shell nouns are not included in Table 2, but noted at the end of Table 2. As the total words in the two corpora differ (3,223 words in the EAC; 4,039 in the SAC), the raw data on shell noun occurrences are normalized to the occurrence of 200 words for cross-corpus comparison. The number 200 is used for normalization because it represents the word-length maximum of abstracts set by four journals in question (out of six), namely, CALICO Journal, English for Specific Purposes, Modern Language Journal, and TESOL Quarterly.

Table 2. Overall Distributions of Shell Nouns in the Two Corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shell Nouns</th>
<th>Expert Abstracts</th>
<th>L2 Student Abstracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tokens raw per 200 words</td>
<td>Tokens raw per 200 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>result</td>
<td>18 22.36</td>
<td>15 14.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect*</td>
<td>11 13.66</td>
<td>9  8.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>11 13.66</td>
<td>1  0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>10 12.42</td>
<td>6  5.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>task</td>
<td>9   11.18</td>
<td>5   4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finding*</td>
<td>8   9.94</td>
<td>10  9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>method</td>
<td>6   7.45</td>
<td>1   0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measure*</td>
<td>5   6.21</td>
<td>0   0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem</td>
<td>1   1.24</td>
<td>11  10.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aim*</td>
<td>3   3.73</td>
<td>1   0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td>3   3.73</td>
<td>1   0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal*</td>
<td>2   2.48</td>
<td>2   1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factor</td>
<td>2   2.48</td>
<td>2   1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approach</td>
<td>1   1.24</td>
<td>4   3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature</td>
<td>1   1.24</td>
<td>1   0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To compare the distribution of shell nouns across the two corpora, an independent one-tailed \( t \)-test was conducted on the 28 shell nouns. On average, the EAC used more shell nouns (\( M = 6.14, SD = 4.37 \)) than the SAC (\( M = 4.75, SD = 2.70 \)). Yet, this difference was not significant (\( t(38) = 1.210, p = .117 > .05, r = .19 \)).

The results showed that shell noun use in the SAC was not significantly different from that of the EAC, which seems to reflect the rhetorical characteristic of abstracts. Abstracts typically are densely loaded with key propositions extracted from RAs (Hsieh & Liou, 2008; Lau, 2004). In the present study, this rhetorical characteristic seems to prompt both the experts and L2 students to effectively incorporate shell nouns and indexed shell contents for realizing “propositional density” (Flowerdew, 2003). With shell nouns as rhetorical clues, readers can successfully retrieve the designated shell contents spread over, and efficiently comprehend abstracts.

Besides describing the overall distribution, the study further analyzed shell nouns with high-frequency across the two corpora. The EAC served as a benchmark for high-frequency shell nouns by five occurrences as the criteria for inclusion; eight shell nouns were identified. The shell noun *problem* was also included due to its frequent occurrence in the SAC. Within this group of nine shell nouns, the EAC used more high-frequency shell nouns (\( M = 4.9, SD = 3.81 \)) than the SAC (\( M = 2.97, SD = 2.24 \)). This difference was statistically significant according to the one-tailed \( t \)-test (\( t(38) = 1.952 > 1.645, *p = .029 < .05, r = .30 \)).

Figure 1 displays the cross-corpora difference in the use of the 9 high-frequency shell nouns (*result, effect, change, type, task, finding, method, measure, and problem*). The use of these high-frequency shell nouns will be detailed by qualitative analysis below.
Move-located Distributions of High-Frequency Shell Nouns

In response to the third research question regarding the distribution of high-frequency shell nouns in the two corpora, the occurrence of each shell noun is located by move tags. The complete tally results of move-located shell nouns are in Appendix C. With the tally results, the interplay between shell noun and its move location will be further analyzed by rhetorical functions.

Use of Shell Nouns as Signposts to Move Structures.

Analyzing the move-located shell nouns revealed that the linking functions were employed to signal rhetorical moves linguistically. For instance, in Example 4, the expert writer employed different shell nouns as clear arrows in directing the move structure. In the Purpose move, effect characterized design of the study intervention. In the Result move, result served as a pivotal joint linking the study intervention with the concrete empirical outcomes. In the Conclusion move, finding presented the general empirical evidence. Via the use of the nouns effect, result, and finding across moves, the causal relations of the study are logically articulated with orderly transition of the propositions, including the study intervention, concrete and general outcomes. The orderly transition of the propositions may be partially attributed to the “linking” function that the expert writer conveys by different shell nouns (Schmid, 2000). Such effective use of shell nouns serves as a model presenting how move structures in abstracts can be signified linguistically.

(4) //B//...//P// This study examined the effects of computer anxiety on students’ choice of feedback methods and academic performance...//M//...//R// The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that the students’ choices of feedback method varied... //C//The findings reveal the importance of recognizing computer anxiety and creating a learning environment in which students who are highly computer anxious are not disadvantaged. (EAC17)

In terms of using varying shell nouns across moves, the student writers used both result and finding in an abstract, although they mapped shell nouns onto moves in a way different from that of the expert writers. In Example 5, a student writer used finding to address the primary study outcomes in the Result move, while using result to address the general study outcomes in...
the Conclusion move. This shell noun use seems inconsistent with Schmid’s (2000) causal-relationship framework in which finding denotes more abstract outcomes from global perspectives, while result denotes more concrete and stative outcomes linked to the casual chain more directly. This inconsistency implies that the student writers may be unaware of this subtle nuance of meaning for finding and result. They simply used these two shell nouns interchangeably.

(5) //R// Regarding the findings of the current study, the category “compensation” had the highest frequency… //C// Finally, the results can enrich our understanding of EFL reading strategies used by vocational high school students in Taiwan and further improve their English proficiency. (SAC 11)

Besides being signposts of move structures, the move-tagged shell nouns were recorded by their recurrences in two or more moves. The recurrence reveals to what extent a shell noun consolidates a given concept throughout. Table 3 presents these recurrences in both corpora. The EAC has 16 recurrences out of 79 shell noun tokens based on 9 high-frequency shell nouns. The SAC shows 9 recurrences out of 58 tokens.

In Table 3, the move-tagged shell nouns can be interpreted by three notes. First, the occurrence of each shell noun is represented by a move tag in an uppercase letter. Taking result in Table 3 for example, “EAC1: R-C” indicates that the noun result appeared in Result and Conclusion moves in Abstract 1 of the EAC. Second, in the column of move-located distributions, move tag is repeated to show the reiteration of a shell noun in the same move. Taking type for example, “EAC14: R-R-R-C” denotes that type occurs three times in Result move in Abstract 14 of the EAC. Third, how these move-tagged recurrences interact with moves is highlighted. That is, unmarked moves indicate a shell noun recurring in two continuous moves; underlined moves indicate the recurrence in two distant moves. Boldfaced moves show the recurrence in three or more moves. In this way, the interaction between shell noun recurrences and moves may be easily revealed.

Table 3. Patterns of High-Frequency Shell Noun Recurrences in Two-moves in the Two Corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shell nouns/ Two corpora</th>
<th>Move-located distributions of shell nouns in EAC</th>
<th>Move-located distributions of shell nouns in SAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>EAC 9: P-M EAC14: R-R-R-C</td>
<td>SAC 14: P-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>EAC4: P-R EAC 9:P-M-R</td>
<td>SAC 5:B-B-P-P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>EAC 19: P-P-R-R-R-R-C</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>task</td>
<td>EAC 4: P-M-R-C EAC10: M-R</td>
<td>SAC 3: P-M-M-M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finding</td>
<td>EAC 8: R-C</td>
<td>SAC 10: R-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>method</td>
<td>EAC 17: P-M-R</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measure</td>
<td>EAC4: M-R</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SAC 4: P-P-P-R-R-R-R-R SAC18: P-M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 counts / 79 (tokens)</td>
<td>9 counts/ 58 (tokens)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of Shell Nouns in Two Adjacent Moves.

As shown in Table 3, reentering the same shell noun in two adjoined moves was fairly common in the two corpora. It implies that the student writers were capable of employing shell nouns within two adjacent moves. To detail the recurrent patterns, the analysis below will scrutinize the rhetorical functions that a shell noun performs in two adjoined moves, in two distant moves, and in more than two moves.

Example 6 illustrates how the noun *task* is repeated in the Purpose and Method moves to conceptualize *task* as the key design in a student’s abstract. In the Purpose move, *task* is introduced as new information in the term Task-Based Approach. As the word is a discipline-specific term, the realization of *task* rests less on the surrounding discourse than on background knowledge (exophoric reference). Realizing the *task* largely draws upon readers’ decisions on whether to utilize their background knowledge (Aktas & Cortes, 2008); it is not categorized as a shell noun.

In the Purpose move, another *task* is treated as given information, acting as a modifier in introducing a new concept: participants’ course of “*task* engagement and completion.” However, the meaning of *task* is yet to be realized. In the Method move, *task* is finally realized with varying referents, “a pre-writing *task*, a series of communicative and collaborative *tasks*, and a post-writing *task*.” The nature of *task* is elaborated as L2 students’ performance of narrative writing and awareness of audience in the following text. “A pre-writing task” is specified as a measure for “each subject’s current level of performance on narrative.” “A series of communicative and collaborative *tasks*” is specified as “wherein the writing audience was contextually specified to aid them in the completion of a narrative writing *task* through multiple drafts.” Finally, “a post-writing *task*” refers to the evaluation of the approach effect; that is whether audience awareness can improve L2 students’ performance of narrative writing. Accordingly, *task* is clearly conceptualized in the abstract.

(6) //P// The present study attempts to investigate whether... the Task-based Approach to teaching writing could be conducive to cultivating EFL undergraduates’ awareness of the intended audience in their course of *task* engagement and completion. //M//...a pre-writing *task* and pre-study questionnaire were administered to gain insights into each subject’s current level of performance on narrative and their conceptions regarding audience awareness of writing. they were involved in a series of communicative and collaborative *tasks* wherein the writing audience was contextually specified to aid them in the completion of a narrative writing *task* through multiple drafts. What ensued were a post-writing *task* and post-study questionnaire to examine the effects of this approach. (SAC 3)

Use of Shell Nouns in Two Discontinuous Moves.

Besides the shell noun recurrence in two adjoined moves, the recurrence in two discontinuous moves was also identified in both corpora. Table 5 reports three incidences in the EAC (4, 6, and 20) and two incidences in the SAC (4, 14). In Example 7, the student writer uses *problem* three times in the Purpose move. The first *problem* is characterized as a feature of
incoherence in EFL learners’ essays, with its shell contents spreading over the preceding and following discourse at the in-clause level. The second problem in the Purpose move is characterized by a paraphrase of the first characterization, with its shell contents scattering in both a pre-modification possessive case and a post-modification prepositional phrase. The third problem is attached to a pre-modification “incoherence,” which coins a noun phrase (i.e., the incoherence problem) to encapsulate the feature of interest in the study. In the Result move, the noun phrase recurs twice to consolidate this feature of interest, and problem recurs in a form similar to the noun phrase, such as “the problem”, or “the participant’s incoherent problem.” The student writer seems to have developed skills of reiterating a shell noun to emphasize this feature of interest, maintaining lexical cohesion of the abstract.

(7) //P//...Recently, incoherence had been found as one of the major problems in Taiwanese EFL learners’ written products (Chang, 1998...). Accordingly, to understand the less experienced EFL writers’ problems in achieving coherence, the study intended to explore their knowledge of coherence and their self-awareness about incoherence problems through analyzing their written products.//M//...//R// The findings of the study were as follows: (1) (2) most participants did not have sufficient self awareness toward the incoherence problems in their written products; and (3) the participants would not be able to adopt effective strategies to deal with the incoherence problems if they were not aware of the problems. The study also uncovered that laziness for revising was a cause of the participants’ incoherence problems. (SAC 4)

Although the student writers seemingly have demonstrated their ability to repeat a shell noun in two adjoined or distant moves for maintaining lexical cohesion, there are differences in the shell noun recurrence in the two corpora. Particularly, the difference was found in the recurrence across three or four moves. The EAC showed four incidences of the recurrence out of 20 abstracts, accounting for 20 per cent of the corpus. The SAC had zero incidences. This difference implies that student writers may not be fully aware of, or are less confident using shell nouns to consolidate concepts of interest.

Use of Shell Nouns across Three or Four Moves.

In Example 8, the expert writer characterizes task as the main design of the study and reiterates task in the Background-Method-Result-Conclusion moves to emphasize its conceptual importance. In the Background move, the nature of task is first characterized by the pre-modification (i.e., oral narrative tasks). In the Method and Result moves, task serves as old information, with its meaning retrievable from the Background move. Task here functions as an adjective in introducing a new concept (i.e., measures of task performance), as can be seen by task used in singular form in these two moves, yet in plural form in the Background and Conclusion moves. In the Conclusion move, task recurs alongside a pre-modification (i.e., narrative tasks). Although this task recurrence only includes part of the pre-modification used in the Background move, readers can easily recover the complete pre-modification by context. Readers can reinforce their perception of the study design construed in the preceding discourse. With the four recurrences of task in the expert abstract, readers’ understanding of the study design can be easily enhanced when reading along.
The aim of this article is to investigate the effect of creativity on performance in oral narrative tasks. We examined the relationships between 3 aspects of creativity—originality—and different measures of task performance. The findings suggest that the 3 components of creativity have a differential effect on the measures of task performance. The magnitude of the correlations indicates that creativity affects participants’ output in narrative tasks only moderately.

Similarly, in Example 9, the expert writer uses change in the Purpose-Result-Method-Result-Conclusion moves. Change is used to encapsulate the participants’ developments in four areas of English ability, namely, English proficiency, phonological awareness, oral proficiency, and vocabulary. In the Purpose move, change is first characterized as developments in English proficiency and phonological awareness, with its shell contents in a post-modifying prepositional phrase. In the first Result move, change is characterized as a development in the third area of English ability (oral English proficiency), with its shell contents in a post-modifying prepositional phrase. Another change recurs with no post-modifiers, yet the latter change can be easily realized by anaphorically referring to the change characterization in the preceding discourse of the same sentence. In the second Method move, change is characterized by another English ability (vocabulary), alongside phonological awareness.

A second aim was to determine the extent to which change in English proficiency over the course of the intervention could be attributed to change in phonological awareness. Although both groups showed significant change in oral English proficiency over pretest scores, an analysis of covariance, covarying..., indicated the phonological awareness group showed greater change than did the story-reading group. Multiple regression analyses were conducted with measures of sound discrimination, short-term memory, and change in vocabulary and phonological awareness in the predictive model. Results indicated that changes in phonological awareness variables were the only significant predictors of change in oral English proficiency. Thus, a balanced reading program for limited English proficient, Spanish-speaking kindergarten children... should also include phonological awareness instruction for the added benefit of greater change in oral English proficiency.

After change is clearly characterized as the four areas of English ability, the expert writer reiterates change in its full noun phrases (change alongside the complete post-modifiers) to elucidate the interactions among these four English abilities that constitute the prime study concern. The study primarily is concerned with how participants’ phonological awareness affects oral English proficiency. To address this prime concern, change is repeated several times introducing two English abilities (i.e., change in phonological awareness; change in oral English proficiency). Particularly, change pertaining to phonological awareness is reentered in both the second Method and the second Result moves. With its first occurrence in the Purpose move, three recurrences are identified in total.

Change relative to oral English ability is entered in the first and second Result moves, and in the Conclusion moves, totaling four recurrences of such use. While change relative to oral English ability is reiterated four times in the abstract, it is not realized directly. Change is
realized as a developmental process of oral English proficiency by implying an increase in the test scores at the across-clause level. In its first occurrence in the Result move, a pre-modifying adjective and a post-modifying prepositional phrase is attached to change, shown in “significant change in oral English proficiency over pretest scores.” However, in this instance, change is not described explicitly as an increase or a decline in the test scores, although increase, rather than decline, after language instruction is expected by most readers in the field of L2 learning. This expectation is finally confirmed in the Conclusion move of the abstract. The Conclusion move suggests that helping limited English-proficient kindergarteners is feasible by including phonological-awareness instruction in reading programs. Phonological-awareness instruction can bring “the added benefit of greater change in oral English proficiency.” By the noun phrase “the added benefit,” change is finally realized as a beneficial process of language development. This realization suggests that change refers to the test-score increase in oral English proficiency.

Table 4 reports a summary of cross-move recurrence of a shell noun in both corpora. Both the L2 student and expert writers reiterated a shell noun with one or various realizations in two adjoined and discontinuous moves. Moreover, the expert writers were more adept at persistently reentering a shell noun with an identical realization across three or four moves in abstracts. Apparently, when a shell noun with an identical realization recurs in more moves, it consolidates an established concept throughout.

Table 4. Summary of the Cross-move Recurrence of a Shell Noun in the Two Corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-move recurrence of a shell noun</th>
<th>The EAC</th>
<th>The SAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-adjointed moves</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓ Example 6 (SAC 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-discontinuous moves</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓ Example 7 (SAC 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or four moves</td>
<td>✓ Example 8 (EAC 4)</td>
<td>✓ Example 9 (EAC 19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Important Differences across the Corpora.

Given the fact that abstracts are usually subject to strict word-constraints, there seems a trade-off between style and precision on the word choices of the expert writers. Rhetorically, the expert writers choose to “[s]acrifice stylistic elegance for clarity and conspicuousness” (Schmid, 2000, p. 359). This rhetorical choice seemingly consolidates a key concept in the expert abstracts, reminds readers of the importance of this concept throughout, and avoids ambiguity of the expressions. The L2 student writers also take this rhetorical choice, yet they only reiterate a concept-laden shell noun in two moves, rather than three or four moves. Such reiteration the student writers employ may be less complete in consolidating a key concept, which in turn achieves less lexical cohesion. A similar conclusion was reached by Aktas and Cortes (2008).
Conclusion

The study describes distribution and rhetorical functions of shell nouns in expert and L2 student abstracts of research articles (RA) in applied linguistics. The study tagged each shell noun by a move of communicative purpose to show its rhetorical functions against the backdrop of move structures. Results indicate that the expert writers more frequently used different shell nouns (i.e., effect, result, and finding) to signal moves, compared to the L2 students. The expert writers tended to reenter a shell noun laden with key concepts across three or more moves, while the student writers did so only across two moves. This difference implies that student writers may not be fully aware of, or are less confident of, using shell nouns to signal moves or consolidate concepts of interest. However, the findings need to be interpreted with caution given the small size of the corpora. To cross-validate the findings, replication targeting different disciplines in larger corpora will be needed. Replication can also target each section of RAs (i.e., Introduction-Method-Result-Discussion).

On the basis of our preliminary results, equipping L2 students with skills in using shell nouns in move structures in abstracts warrants instructional efforts at both global and local levels. At the global level, L2 students’ awareness of move structures can be raised by explicitly introducing type and structure of moves conventional in their fields (Hancioglu, 2009; Lau, 2004). Against the backdrop of move structures, L2 students may learn to use shell nouns as cohesive devices at the local level. They may start with reading expert abstracts to recognize rhetorical functions of shell nouns for signifying move structures, consolidating established concepts, and advancing textual development.

Aware of such discipline-specific use of shell nouns, L2 students may learn to produce shell nouns in abstracts. They may convey their communicative purposes more persuasively by organizing propositions and constructing arguments according to their disciplinary norms. Hence, they may become more capable of voicing their opinions in abstract practices and eventually gain a membership in their disciplinary communities to publish opinions legitimately (Swales, 1990).

About the author:

Ming-Chia Lin is a postdoctoral fellow at National Tsing-Hua University in Taiwan. She is interested in text analysis on the genre of research articles.
References


Appendix A: The list of articles included in the Expert Abstract Corpus


**Appendix B: The list of articles included in the L2 Student Abstract Corpus**


1. FG 02: Evaluating learner-centeredness of online courseware in Taiwan
2. FG 03: The repetition of collocations in EFL textbooks: A corpus study
3. FP 04: Developing audience awareness of narrative writing through the task-based approach
4. FP 06: Less experienced EFL writers’ knowledge and self-awareness of coherence in English Writing
6. FP 16: Effects of exposure frequency and contextual situations of a word on incidental learning of vocabulary.
8. FP 205: The impact of youtube on teaching and assessing English speeches
9. FP 208: English teachers’ perspectives on use of speech recognition technology
10. FP 210: Voicing Learners’ Problems in Technical Writing: Analysis of Science Majors.
11. FP 211: A study of EFL reading strategies used by vocational high school students in Taiwan
12. FP 221: The developments of college learners’ academic vocabulary in writing: Appropriateness and accuracy.


13. FF02: The use of English causative verbs in EFL learners’ writing.
14. FP07: Reading instructional strategies in a junior high school EFL classroom.

15. FP29: On the were-subjunctive in written and spoken English.


17. FP19: How can writing be better instructed through students’ eyes? - A multi-dimensional investigation

18. FS02: Coherence in Chinese students’ English writing: An initiative to a learners’ corpus

19. FP08: Gifted students’ vocabulary learning strategies.

20. FP04: A study on EFL teachers’ use of supplementary teaching materials.

**Appendix C: Move-located shell nouns in both corpora.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstracts in the two corpora</th>
<th>Move tags: Background-Purpose-Method-Result-Conclusion (Occurrences of high-frequency shell nouns)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expert Abstract Corpus</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC1</td>
<td>P-M-R(result/type)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC2</td>
<td>B-P(effect*2)-R-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC3</td>
<td>B-P-M-C(method)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC4</td>
<td>P(effect/task)-M(task/measure)-R(effect/finding/task/measure)-C(task) 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC5</td>
<td>P-M-R(result/type*2)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC6</td>
<td>P(result)-M-P-M-R(result)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC7</td>
<td>P(task)-M-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC8</td>
<td>P(change*2)-M-R(finding)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC9</td>
<td>P(effect/type)-M(effect/problem/type/measure)-R(effect/result)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC10</td>
<td>P-M(task)-R(result/task)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC11</td>
<td>P-M-R-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC12</td>
<td>P-M-R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC13</td>
<td>B-P(method)-M-R(result)-C(effect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC14</td>
<td>P-R(type*3)-C(method/type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC15</td>
<td>B(change)-M(effect)-R(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC16</td>
<td>P-M(type)-R(result)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC17</td>
<td>B-P(effect/method)-M(method)-R(method/result)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC18</td>
<td>P(effect)-M-R(result)-C(result/task*2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC19</td>
<td>P(change<em>2)-M(change/measure</em>2)-R(change*4/result)-C(change/result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC20</td>
<td>P(result)-M-R-C(result)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Abstract Corpus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAC1</th>
<th>B-P-M-R(result)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAC2</td>
<td>B-P-M-R(result)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC3</td>
<td>P(task)-M(effect/task*4)-R-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC4</td>
<td>P(problem<em>3)-M-R(finding/problem</em>4)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC5</td>
<td>B(effect<em>2)-P(effect</em>2)-M(type)-R(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC6</td>
<td>P(effect)-M-R(finding)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC7</td>
<td>B-P-M-R-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC8</td>
<td>P-M-R(effect)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC9</td>
<td>B-P-M-R(problem/result)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC10</td>
<td>P-M-R(finding)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC11</td>
<td>M-R(finding)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC12</td>
<td>B-P(change)-M(type)-R(result)-C(finding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC13</td>
<td>B-P(type)-M-R(result)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC14</td>
<td>P(type)-M(method)-R(finding/type)-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC15</td>
<td>P-M-R-C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAC16</th>
<th>B-P-M-R(finding)-C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAC17</td>
<td>B(problem)-P-M-R(result)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC18</td>
<td>P(problem)-M(problem)-R(result)-C(effect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC19</td>
<td>B-P-M-R(effect/result)-C(result)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC20</td>
<td>B-M-R(finding/type)-C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE.** 1. Shell nouns are put in parentheses and attached to varying move tags in each abstract. 2. *2 or *3 indicates that a shell noun occurs 2 or 3 times in the same move.
Silence and Politeness in Jordanian Society

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Abstract

In Western societies, silence has been the focus of the studies in the last two decades. However, it has not been studied to such an extent in the Arab World. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the employment of silence as a politeness strategy in casual conversation in Jordanian Arabic. Twelve dyadic conversations were conducted for 30 minutes each. The participants were 24 university students at Yarmouk University (Jordan): 12 males and 12 females. They were grouped into two main groups: friends and strangers. Ninety seconds were analysed from the beginning, the middle, and the end of each conversation; these extracts were chosen randomly. The theoretical framework of this study draws on ethnography of communication, politeness theory and Sack et al’s (1974) turn-taking model. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence can be used as a positive politeness strategy to avoid confrontation and to save face.

Key words: silence, face, politeness, pragmatic, hesitation, interruption, turn-taking and casual conversations
Introduction

Silence has been neglected in politeness research (Nakane, 2006), since it has not been given sufficient interest, especially in Jordanian society. I have not found a single paper that investigates the use of silence as a politeness strategy in Jordanian society. Silence is a multifaceted and complex linguistic phenomenon, because its interpretation is ambiguous and relies heavily on the socio-cultural norms of a certain society, and the context of situation. To study the employment of silence as a politeness strategy, it is important to investigate the pragmatic function of silence. Pragmatics relies on context to interpret the intentional meaning of a speaker (Ariel, 2010). This is why this study depends on pragmatics to investigate the use of silence as a politeness strategy and to interpret the meaning of silence in its real context of situation. This study also seeks to address the following questions:

A) What is the relationship between silence and politeness?

B) How do Jordanians practice and perceive silence as a politeness strategy?

C) Is silence employed as a positive politeness or as a negative politeness strategy in Jordanian society?

This study proposes a multifaceted model for interpreting silence in social context. This model aims to provide different factors in pragmatic domains to study the relationship between politeness and silence in its social context. Silence is a complex phenomenon. The theoretical framework of the study is, therefore, a combination of Halliday’s notion of context of situation; Sacks et al’s (1974) model of Turn-taking structure, ethnography of communication and politeness theory.

Background

Silence can convey multi-meanings, such as "impressions, attitudes, emotions, and intentions with illocutionary force" (Nakane, 2003). Furthermore, "silence is the language of all strong passions, such as love, anger, surprise and fear" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 37). Silence has been defined by the Oxford English dictionary as ‘complete absence of sound’ or ‘the fact or state of abstaining from speech’. Soundlessness, noiselessness, absence of sound, stillness, quietness, emptiness, tranquillity and peacefulness are all words that describe silence. It is clear that silence is defined semantically not pragmatically, because silence in real interaction functions as a linguistic form that conveys meaning in the same way as speech does.

Silence is a non-verbal human behaviour indicates the cultural beliefs and activities of a given group (Hall, 1959). Hall (1959) suggests that culture and communication are the same and that culture determines behaviour, and if someone wishes to interact with a person from a foreign culture, s/he should recognise that non-linguistic and linguistic patterns are significant. The interpretation of silence is therefore culture-specific (Kurzon, 1998). Lehtonen & Sajavaara (1985) explain that the communicative silence may change the intention of the speaker from verbal to non-verbal channel of communication. Silence has the most pivotal cues of the message. Silence can be cultural-specific, which is different from one culture to another or even between friends and unacquainted people.
It is clear that speech and silence do not contradict each other. However, they "form a continuum of forms ranging from the most prototypical instances of silence to the most prototypical instances of speech" (Jaworski, 1993). Silence also occurs during speech. Thus it is impossible to avoid it (Saville-Troike, 1985). Silence and speech should be interpreted in relation to each other. Speakers also have to recognise the structure, the meaning and the purpose of silence in communication. The function of silence not only marks the boundaries of utterances, but also has the "stylistic function of emphasizing arguments and ideas, they [silences] are especially used by experienced speakers to impress their listeners and elicit applause" (Jaworski, 1993).

Since silence has various definitions, the meaning that it represents in the interaction is ambiguous. Silence is a part of language that conveys meaning as words do, yet it is a non-verbal behaviour, and it is a linguistic behaviour that helps in structuring the conversation (Saville-Troike, 1985). Saville-Troike (1985) define silence as an out-of-awareness phenomenon-the ground against which the figure of talk is perceived. By reversing polarities and treating silence as the figure to be examined against the ground of talk (as well as other actions or events), we aim to lighten awareness of this universal aspect of human behaviour while at the same time emphasising its complex nature as a cultural phenomenon and its richness as a study site.

Saville-Troike (1985) highlights that the meaning of silence is affected by the values and the norms of a speech community. For instance, social status and age may serve as a social distinction. The meaning of silence will therefore change. Silence has illocutionary force, per-locutionary effects and adds truth-value to speech. For example, silence can be used ‘to question, promise, deny, warn, threaten, insult, request or recommend, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction’ (Saville-Troike, 1985). Consider the following example which explicates this notion:

Child: Mom! I will go to play outside.

Mother: Silence (gazing angrily at him/her).

Child: Ok, I will not go.

In this example, while the mother's silence signifies the illocutionary force of threatening or warning of the child not to go out, the child's response indicates the per-locutionary effect. S/he is therefore affected by the mother's response (warning). Overall, silence has an illocutionary force, especially in accepting or refusing an invitation.

According to Jaworski (1993, p. 46), "the absence of speech does not imply the absence of communication". That is to say, people can communicate with non-verbal communication, such as body language and silence. In addition, the interpretation of speech is strongly based on the non-verbal component of communication. In other words, interlocutors can communicate without speech. For example, acquainted speakers can communicate using body movements and silence. This study corroborates the idea of Jaworski (1993) who suggests that in conversations between
people who are intimate, interlocutors use silence rather than words, especially when one of them is trying to criticise the other. In other words, the distance between the interlocutors can make speech (verbal communication) very difficult, especially when they wish to say a word which is socially unacceptable. The speaker therefore relies on non-verbal cues such as visual signals or silence to say that word. Jaworski (1993) provides an example for his assumption; a Polish dyad between a wife and her husband who were driving 250km away from their home. They see a traffic sign that says that they are about to arrive at their destination. The wife said "one can make it on foot from here". The husband points at the car’s door as an indication to her to get out of the car and walk.

Silence has been divided into different types or forms. Bruneau (1973) proposes three major forms of silence: first, psycholinguistic silence which consists of selected fast-time silences that "are imposed mental silences closely associated with the temporal-horizontal sequencing of speech in mind" and slow-time silences that "are imposed mental silences closely associated with a semantic process of decoding speech" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 24). Second, interactive silence is "pausal interruptions in dialogue, discussion and debates" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 28). This may affect the relationship between the interlocutors and it may affect the alternation of information. Third, socio-cultural silence may "define cultural patterns of communication much better than what is said" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 36).

Van Manen (1990, p. 114) suggests three types of silence: firstly, "the literal silence", when there is no sound. It is sometimes crucial to remain silent rather than to speak. For example, an attendee in court should not speak without the permission of the judge. Secondly, "epistemological silence", in which we have awareness of what is happening around us, but which is difficult to describe in words. In other words, "it is not available in our linguistic competency" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 114). For example, if someone experiences a fearful or embarrassing situation, s/he cannot express him or herself in words. Finally, "ontological silence is the silence of being or life itself". It is a philosophical idea of thinking of the essence of the world around us, such as nature, mankind, animals and so on.

Alerby and Elidottir (2003, p. 43) define two types of silence: firstly, "internal silence". This type of silence is special for us and our inside thoughts that nobody knows. Secondly, "oppressed silence", when one is obliged to keep silent for various reasons, for example, being subject to abuse through ignorance, or as object of an exercise of power. Oppressed people may have the idea that no one will listen to them or value them (Alerby & Elidottir, 2003).

Silence has various functions in communication. According to Saville-Troike (1985), silence in any social settings has two types of function: first, macro-functions, such as "social control, ritual interaction with the supernatural, and establishment or reinforcement of group identity". Second, micro-functions refer to the interlocutors’ purposes and needs. Micro-functions include "the level of individuals and small interacting group within a society" (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 14). An example of macro-function is the social punishment of silence among the Igbo, when an individual breaks a social norm. No one in the community will talk to him and to his family as a punishment until he comes on his knees asking for forgiveness. Then the
sanction on speech will be lifted and again he becomes a full member of the society (Nwoye, 1985). An example of a micro-function is imposing silence in the classroom setting. Silence has communicative function in interaction; it functions as speech (Jaworski, 1993; Jaworski 1997; Saville-Troike, 1985). Walker (1985, p. 61) defines pause as "some unit of time in which phonation is absent, but filled pauses have no agreed-upon definition at all". In addition, a pause is "a noticeable hiatus in an ongoing speech stream, which implies, of course, that what is a pause in some circumstances is not in others" (Walker, 1985, p. 62). Researchers in psychology classify the pause into two main classes: in-turn pauses, which occur with the utterance of one speaker only, and switching pauses, which occur at the end of the speaker’s turn (Walker, 1985). Walker (1985, p. 61) divides switching pauses into: "A-pause for (Answerer) and Q-pause for (questioner), and they are so named ownership of the stretch of time in which they occur". Therefore, any silence after the question belongs to the answer. Walker (1985) establishes two critical times for pause: a pause between turns becomes a switching pause when it meets or exceeds 1.5 seconds, and an in-turn pause is counted when it reaches or exceeds 1.0 second.

Sacks et al (1974) identify three different kinds of silence: first, intra-turn silence or within a single turn, not at a Transition Relevance Place (TRP), is a pause. Second, silence after TRP is a gap and it can be minimised or transformed into a pause when the current speaker continues talking. Third, a lapse occurs when silence at TRP is extended, because no speaker has selected him or herself to be the next speaker. This type of silence is similar to what Goffman (1967, p. 36) called ‘lull’, which occurs when the interlocutors have nothing to say in the conversation.

In Jordan, there are only two studies that examine the communicative function of silence: Salih and Bader (1997) examine the function of silence in the classroom in Jordanian schools. Al-Sahawneh (1996) studies the function of silence in Jordanian society in general and in classrooms in particular. He studies three occasions: funerals, wedding parties, and engagements. He discusses the differences and similarities between the function of silence in Jordanian society and American and Danish societies. Al-Sahawneh (1996) concludes that silence is functional in Jordanian society with regard to deaths, wedding parties and engagement occasions as well as in Jordanian classrooms. The function of silence can be changed according to context and social settings. Silence is also practised by Jordanians "to avoid confrontation, thoughtfulness, ignorance, safety and security, resistance to an authority figure, embarrassment, respect, patience and wisdom" (Al-Sahawneh, 1996, p. 80).

One of the limitations of Al-Sahawneh’s (1996) study is that it does not explain how silence is perceived and practised on these social occasions. In addition, there is no real context of situation. Moreover, his study doesn’t tackle the relationship between silence and politeness. He asks his participants to fill in a questionnaire. His results can be therefore simplistic and superficial. He conflates the study of silence in social settings with silence in classrooms, which are two different fields of studying silence. Furthermore, these occasions are formal. His study is mainly focused on silence in the context of Jordanian classrooms. Nevertheless, this study is distinctive, because it investigates how Jordanians perceive and practise silence as a politeness strategy, particularly in social settings. In other words, it studies silence in an informal setting.
i.e. casual conversation. As a result, this study fills this linguistic gap. It is also more comprehensive than the previous studies in terms of the methodology. Al-Sahawneh used the quantitative approach, but this study is qualitative and ethnographic in its approach; it also sheds light on gender differences in Jordanian society.

This study deals with three types of silence: first, intra-turn silence, silence within a turn. This silence usually occurs before TRP. Second, inter-turn silence occurs at TRP. This silence is firstly a gap, when it is extended; it becomes a lapse, which is the third type of silence, where neither the current speaker nor the recipient takes the floor. It is clear that silence has various meanings in human communication. It is a communicative and a cultural phenomenon. So, it serves different meanings among different cultures. For this reason, this study investigates this blurred phenomenon.

**Silence and Politeness**

Politeness can be defined as “the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face” (Yule, 1996, p.60). The idea of politeness is based on face which is a technical term that is related to the public self-image of a person (Yule, 1996). Silence can be used as a politeness strategy in social interaction to avoid confrontation and disagreement (Jaworski & Stephens, 1998; Sifianou, 1997, Nankane, 2006; Jaworski, 1993, 1997). Silence is also not preferable in communication (Sifianou, 1997). Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Sifianou (1997) elaborates on how silence expresses politeness in interaction cross-culturally with regard to Greek and English societies. Brown and Levinson (1987) do not concentrate on silence in their model, as they refer to it as "Don’t do the FTAs" without including it in their politeness theory. To elucidate, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose a model for politeness theory, which is based on the notion of face that has two specific types of desires or ‘face wants’: first, ‘positive face’ the desire to be acceptable and liked by others. In this case, the relationship between interlocutors is friendly and reciprocal. Second, ‘negative face’, which is ‘the desire to be unimpeded in one’s action’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 13).

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that all verbal activities or speech in general imply a positive or a negative face threat to either the speaker or the hearer. They call this strategy "Face Threatening Acts" or (FTAs). FTAs mean that a person may say something against the expectation of another speaker who concerns with saving his/her public self-image or his/her face wants. This can be considered as a threat to his/her face (Yule, 1996, p.61). In order to decrease the potential threat, the speaker can say something which is called "face saving act" (Yule, 1996, p.61). According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 14), FTAs are controlled by three social variables or factors: 'social distance' between the interlocutors, the ‘relative power’ and the status of imposition that are involved in FTAs. They propose five strategies in dealing with FTAs; they can be illustrated by Figure (1):
Figure 1. Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs. Adapted from (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60)

To explicate these strategies, on-record strategy (Bald) is a direct request between two friends who are intimate, i.e. “Close the window”. On-record strategy could be expressed by both positive politeness and negative politeness. The former means the speaker thinks that the listener wishes to be respected; it is a friendly and a reciprocal relationship, i.e. "Could you please close the window?" The latter, means that the listener wishes to be respected and the speaker may impose on him/her to do something, i.e. "I am sorry to bother you, I just want to ask you if you could close the window?" Jordanian society, like Arab society, is a positive politeness society (Al-khatib, 2001). Off-record strategy is an indirect strategy by which someone asks for something indirectly, i.e. "It is cold here".

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 72) ignore the fifth strategic choice "Don’t do the FTAs", since it provides "no interesting reflexes”. Sfianou (1997) criticises Brown and Levinson for neglecting "Don’t do the FTAs" strategy. According to Sfianou (1997), Brown and Levinson (1987) discover the relationship between silence and politeness, but they consider silence as lacking in politeness. Tannen (1985, p. 97) indicates that ‘silence is the extreme manifestation of indirectness’, because the speaker says nothing but means something. Thus silence is correlated with off-record politeness, "because both positive and negative politeness are usually enacted through the elaboration of redress action" (Sfianou, 1997, p. 73). Sfianou (1997) claims that it is wrong to ascribe silence to the highest degree of "Don’t do the FTAs", as silence has many functions in interaction. Silence also manifests positive, negative or off-record politeness (Sfianou, 1997). Yule (1996, p.62) refers indirectly to the relationship between silence and politeness through "self and other: say nothing" strategy. In other words, when a person asks for something without uttering a word s/he depends on other to recognises his or her want i.e. when someone is searching in his or her pockets or bag for a pen and the other person who sits next to him or her offers him/her a pen. In this event, this person employs silence to avoid a face threatening act.

Turn-Taking System

Sacks et al (1974) refer to the turn-taking system in conversation as a speech exchange system. They study the turn-taking system from a sociological perspective; they confirm that a turn has an important role in social organization. Accordingly, they study the shape of the turn organisation device, and how it affects the allocation of "turns for the activities on which it operates" (Sacks et al., 1974, p.696). They also
explain that the turn-taking system is used to organise many social activities. A good
illustration of this is when the investigator in turn-taking activities decides the types
of activities that are adapted to, or restricted by the specific form of turn-taking, which
operates on it. Sacks et al (1974) demonstrate that there is one speaker at a time in a
conversation; the speakership is changed and turns are allocated between participants
by a certain technique. They therefore concentrate on studying the materials of turn-
taking organization and the techniques of the construction of turn-taking (Sacks et al.,
1974). Suffice it to say that conversation can adapt to many situations and interactions
in which persons of different identities are conversing; it can be sensitive to various
combinations as well and it can adjust to a change of situation within a situation *per
se* (Sacks et al., 1974). Conversation therefore should be context free in its operation
and sensitive to different parameters of social reality (Sacks et al., 1974).

Sacks et al (1974) verify that turn-taking is the basic element of conversation, and it is
allocated to parties of the conversation. In addition, any variations that the participants
may adopt will be accommodated within the change system of turn-taking. Sacks et al
(1974) contend that the turn-taking system of conversation can be explained by two
crucial components, or rules: first, the Turn-Constructional Component (TCU) or the
unit type, i.e. sentence, clause, phrase and lexical constructions, and Turn-Allocation
Component, which are divided into two groups: turns distributed by current speaker
selects next speaker and the ones in which next speaker self-selects. The useful unit
types are those that allow a projection of the unit type under way. However, the unit
types that do not have the feature of projectability may not be useful. To illustrate,
projectability is the case where the second speaker provides an appropriate sequential
start, which may be composed of a single word, single phrase, single clause with no
gap, or no waiting for the possible sentence completion (Sacks et al., 1974). They
postulate that, at the end of each unit-type, or the possible completion point, there is a
transfer of speakership point, which is called the Transition-Relevance Place (TRP).

To conclude, a conversation is a generative machine process. When one starts talking,
the next is preparing him/herself for a new turn. However, there is an inconsistency
with this argument because there may be periods of silences between turns or even
between the TCU's *per se*. These silences or gaps are conversational techniques
employed by speakers to serve a certain communicative function. It can be a strategy
of thinking of what has been said or what will be said next.

**Participants**

The sample for this study was 24 speakers of Jordanian Arabic from Yarmouk
University (Irbid- Jordan) (12 Females and 12 Males). The number 24 was chosen to
ensure gender balance. In each conversation, there were two participants. Their ages
were between 18-26. They were recruited by advertising on campus. The purpose of
the study was explained to them only in general terms to make sure that they did not
try to become silent during the conversation, and to keep to mainstream
communication. The participants were divided into two groups: Twelve friends and
12 strangers, who did not know each other.
Methods and Procedures

The methodology of the present study was qualitative in nature; an ethnographic approach was applied to answer the questions of study. The study adopts the micro-socio-ethnographic technique which involves analysis of small-scale events and processes, such as dyadic communication in social settings. Dyadic Conversations lasted for 30 minutes each and they were video recorded. The researcher met the participants in a staff room inside the university. The researcher showed them the room to reduce their unease in a strange environment. Then the researcher asked them about the suitability of the room to make sure that they were in a comfortable environment. After they were seated in two padded chairs, in front of each other, they were asked to fill in an information sheet about their age, sex, year of study, subject of study and their contact details. Then they were asked to sign the consent form. The researcher also told them that the conversation was audio and video recorded. The researcher asked them to talk about any topic they wished and the researcher provided a piece of paper which had two suggested topics as a kind of assistance in case the participants hesitated to choose a topic: ‘talk about university life’, and ‘talk about your future career’.

The stationary video camera was positioned about three meters away from the participants. The participants were asked to talk with each other for 30 minutes; the researcher left the room during the conversation to avoid any influence on the main stream of communication. After 30 minutes, the researcher came back to switch off the recording devices.

Data Analysis

The data used in the study comprised 12 dyadic conversations in Jordanian Arabic. These conversations consisted of two groups: the first group was the friends' group which consisted of female-female dyads, male-male dyads and male-female dyads. The second group was the strangers’ group that also consisted of female-female dyads, male-male dyads and male-female dyads.

The researcher used Nvivo 8 software to transcribe these conversations. It was a difficult task, because it needed more concentration to grasp what the interlocutors were saying. There were some difficulties in transcribing them as some participants speak in a fast pace. Ninety seconds from the beginning (minutes 1:00-2:30), 90 seconds from the middle (minutes 12:00- 13:30) and 90 seconds from the end (minutes 23:00-24:00) of each conversation were considered in data analysis. These periods were selected from each conversation in order to have a comprehensive overview of the whole conversation, and they represent the whole conversation. In addition, the researcher tried to be systematic in selecting these periods. Praat Software was used to detect the length of silences. Data analysis took nearly seven months. After detecting the length of silence periods, Conversation Analysis approach was used to analyse these data.

Findings of the Study

Politeness is necessary in conversation, because it represents the strength, or the depth of social rapport between speakers. Conversation in general is based on respect
between participants. The degree of politeness between people who are strangers is higher than between friends. Strangers tend to produce more assessment or acknowledgment backchannels than friends do, to show more respect and interest in each other. However, in conversations between friends, the participants have more intimacy or familiarity and stronger relationships, so they don’t feel the need to produce additional assessment backchannels. Silence is therefore tolerated and acceptable between friends. It is more awkward between strangers, because they are distant and they do not have a strong social rapport. Silence is therefore uncomfortable or awkward and the speakers avoid it. Apparently, in conversations between friends, there are longer periods of silence than in conversations between strangers.

The findings of the study indicate that silence might be used to serve some politeness strategies in conversation, such as waiting for the other speaker to complete his or her turn, keeping silent before saying something awkward and so on. This section sheds light on the practice of silence in conjunction with these strategies which aim to maintain the conversation flowing, and they exhibit the social class of the speaker, and the recipient. These politeness strategies are derived from cultural norms, and the politeness etiquette of that society. Silence is perceived and practised in Jordanian society to perform the following polite functions:

The findings of the study demonstrate that silence can be used to serve several politeness functions. Silence has a denotative meaning, as it is polite to be silent while the other speaker is talking. Interruption is also dispreferred, because it seizes the other speaker’s right to complete his or her turn. Jordanian speakers may express their annoyance about verbal interruptions, especially between friends. They may say to the other speaker something like ‘mehna: binsoːif’ (I am still speaking), or ‘billah latgaː tni’ (by God, do not interrupt me). In conversation between unacquainted people, the interrupted speaker remains silent, as s/he is hesitant to express his or her displeasure about the interruption. In addition, silence is used when the current speaker is hesitant, particularly when s/he does not have an adequate knowledge about the topic raised. Being silent while the other speaker is talking is socially required, since this helps to extend the conversation. This section will explore the perception and practice of silence as a politeness strategy in the following areas: saving face, social courtesy, expressing feelings, embarrassment, criticism and swearing.

1. Silence and Saving Face

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence can be used as a face-saving strategy. The recipient tends to be silent before saying something that could be embarrassing to the current speaker. This silence is significant, because the recipient is selecting his or her words carefully in order not to discomfit the current speaker. In extract (1) below, ʕAbdullah is telling ʕanaːn that he is very shy about showing himself among his genuine friends, and he feels embarrassed when someone looks at him while he is speaking. ʕanaːn asks him whether he thinks this behaviour is genuine or not. She is selecting her words carefully in order not to discomfit the current speaker. In line 13, ʕAbdullah is trying to hide his embarrassment by remaining silent for 1.0 second. This silence is significant because it is preceded by lengthening the cause particle ‘ʔinnoːː’ (because)
and it is also followed by lengthening the pause filler ‘ʔe::h’, and then Mmm. Actually, this silence serves as a means of exhibiting his awkwardness, since ġanaːn’s question is direct and unexpected. He is therefore looking for a way to escape from the topic in order to save face. Once again, he is trying to escape from the topic by saying, ‘as I said earlier’ in line 13.

Extract (1), ġanaːn & ġAbdullah (Female-Male, Strangers)

10 ġanaːn: ʔe:::h bitʃof ʔinno ha:d ʔilʔifi sʔeh wala ɣalatʕ(0.7) bidfaʕak liʔama:m ʔaw
11 bishabek lalxalfʔ
12
13 (1.2)
14 ġAbdullah: ʔe:::h haːda ilaʔif ʔe:::h mmm ʔaːdi wesatʕ(0.3) yeʕuni la ho bidfaʕni
15 liʔamaːm wala illa ilxalf(0.2) badʔel maheli miʔal maʔana bes ʔinno:::(1.0) ʔe:::h
16 Mmm keːf bidi ʔahkiːha: zai ma haːkeːtil banheriɣ ikʕilr ʔaʔalaːn lema beʔga
17 gaːid maʕ ifʃabab lema ʔasoːliʔ ifʃi (0.2) kolhom
18 ġanaːn: ʔahlhu
19 ġAbdullah: kolhom intibaːhom ġalai bebatʕ il ʔasoːliʃ.
20
  (1.4)
21 ġanaːn: ʔe:::h, do you think this thing is right or wrong? (0.7) does it push you
22 forward or backward?
23 (1.2)
24 ġAbdullah: ʔe:::h, This thing is Mmm usual (0.3) like, it does not push me
25 forward or backward (0.2), I will be in the same situation, but because (1.0)
26 ʔe:::h Mmm, how can I say it? I feel embarrassed, for example, when my friends
27 look at me while I am talking
28 (0.2)
29 ġanaːn: huh huh
30 ġAbdullah: I stop talking.
31
2. Silence and Social courtesy

The current study reveals that silence seems to be utilised by interlocutors, when they are waiting for the recipient to remember what s/he is going to say. During a conversation, a speaker can be suddenly silent while telling a story in order to remember information related to the story. The other speaker therefore remains silent so as not to interrupt, especially in conversations between strangers. This silence is significant, because it indicates the other speaker’s interest in the current topic. In some cases, the other speaker may interrupt the current speaker co-operatively, especially in conversations between friends. In extract (2), Yasir is talking about his argument with his girlfriend and how the relationship between them has ended. During his turn, Yasir pauses several times and the periods of silence vary in length. The most important silence is 1.8 seconds in line 171. Yasir is emotionally affected by this story. Salman therefore tolerates Yasir’s silences by remaining silent during this period and by avoiding interrupting him. Salman plays the role of an active listener, since he is paying attention to Yasir’s turn.
Extract (2), Yasir & Salman (Males, strangers)

Yasir: FPP → ↑ bið̣̣ abṭ̣ ?awal ?ib?awal lama tārkna baṣuḍ, baṭ alat itrin hi ?o: beṭ alit ?arini ↓ (0.5). ↑ merrat il?ayya:mi,↓ (0.5) ?adḥiːt lage:tha gaːdih maː jeb Θaːni, ibyuːm Θaːni ↓ (0.8) ↑ merrat ilʔaːyuːm,↓ (0.5) qaːtak isʔisʔidig ?inbes aʕfīːt ‘Yallah xale:ha itlagi:lya waːhad Θaːni ?ana la xalasʕ, laʔ Munūh miʃ ?ilhaː↓ (0.4) ↑ ?ana miʃ haːs ?ilhaː ?ifi ibgalbi’ (0.4). fattarikita (0.9) bilfatreh ilʔaxe:reh yumkin sʕurit θaːzaːs banaːt ?u ʕifit đʕaw heːk tʔakθar hurrīyih (0.4) ya hilo: habiːbían ?ahibak.
Salman: SPP → Heh heh heh heh

Salman: Heh heh heh heh
Yasir: We stopped ringing each other gradually after finishing our relationship. (0.5) After several days, (0.5) I saw her sitting with another man on a different day. (1.8) I looked at her. Frankly, I was happy, and I said to myself ‘let her find someone else, I am not for her’ (0.4) I am not for her, I do not feel that I love her’. (0.4) So, I left her (0.9). I have recently started flirting with women, so I have great freedom now (0.4). Oh, sweetie! Oh, darling! I love you!

Silence can be used by the recipient as a means of waiting for the current speaker to complete his or her turn. The recipient remains silent and s/he does not interrupt the current speaker. In addition, s/he may produce continuers and acknowledgments to the current speaker. The findings of the current study support Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985) who find that when one speaker takes the turn, the second practises the role of a listener. Listening does not mean that the listener is silent, simply because this is a type of backchannel behaviour. For example, a recipient may nod or shake his or her head, purse lips, raise eyebrows or s/he may utter continuers or backchannel such as "Mm, Yeah, Okay, cool". Moreover, the speaker is trying to check whether his or her speech is understood by asking the recipient questions such as, "Do you understand what I mean?"

In extract (3) below, Nami:r is criticising the study plan for her field of study, Geology. She thinks that there is no need to study chemistry, physics, and mathematics, since these courses are very difficult, and they have affected her average. In her turn, Nami:r has nine silences. The longest one is of 2.6 seconds in line 42. Again, there is another silence of 1.7 seconds in line 38. Nami:r is looking for reasons to support her judgement. Interestingly, ?Asmaːʔ does not interrupt her during this period, because she is trying to give her enough time to complete her turn, before she initiates. In addition, she saves Nami:r’s face by not interrupting her. This can be seen from the next turn, when she tries to convince Nami:r that she will use calculations in her field of study, Geology. Therefore, ?Asmaːʔ remains silent in order to avoid embarrassing Nami:r.

Extract (3), ?Asmaːʔ & Namiːr: (Females, Friends)

?Asmaːʔ: FPP → ↑ reh tistaxdimm alhisabat rah tistaxdmi.↓ (1.0)
Silence may also be used when one speaker asks the other speaker to start the conversation as an indication of politeness. In this sense, both speakers hesitate to start speaking. This is why they select each other as the next speaker, especially in a mixed-sex conversation. In extract (4) below, Safad selects Ixlas as the next speaker by uttering the utterance ‘t‘ayib ma:jī’ (Okay) and then he remains silent for 1.0 second in line 1. When Ixlas does not take the floor, he utters the continuer ‘ʔah’ (yeah) and then he is silent for 1.6 seconds in line 2. Again, Ixlas selects him as the next speaker by using the continuer ‘ʔaywa’ (Okay), and she remains silent for 1.2 seconds in line 4. This is an indication to him to start the conversation, as the pragmatic meaning of ‘ʔaywa’ is ‘keep talking, I am listening to you’.

Extract (4): Ixlas &Safad (F-M, Friends)

Safad: FPP→↑ t‘ayib ma:jī(1.0) ?ah ʔah↓ (1.6)

Ixlas: SPP→↑ʔaywa

(1.2)

Safad: ↑yeʕni ʔena:: kont imfekur ʔe:::h (1.4) beʕid ittaxaroɗ, (0.3)

Ixlas: ↑ʔah

Safad: ↑isʕehe:h ʔj bidik tiʕmeli beʕid ittaxaroɗ? ↑meʔelan heke:na: bihalmawdʔu;ʕ?
Silence and Expressing Feelings

The findings of the study bring to light the possibility that silence might be used in conjunction with surprise. Surprise occurs when the recipient hears an unexpected utterance from the current speaker. S/he therefore tends to be silent after exhibiting his or her surprise. This silence is noteworthy, because it functions as a means of eliciting a response from the other speaker. In extract (5) below, ʕana:n is talking about the advantages of the communist system. She explains that this system provides people with food, accommodation and everything they need in life. However, ʕAbdullah seems to be unconvinced, because he asks her what people will pay for these things. She exhibits her surprise by uttering ‘muq:bil ʔe:f! ’(The price of what?), and then she is silent for 0.5 seconds in line 374. This silence serves as either a means of showing her discomfort about what she has heard from him, since she is enthusiastic about communist views, or it functions as a way of thinking of a response to support her point of view.

Extract (5), ʕAbdullah & ʕana:n (Male- Female, strangers)

ʕAbdullah: FPP→ ↑ tˤab muqa:bil ʔe:f ʃ ha:d? ↓ =
ʕana:n : =SPP→ ↑ muq:bil ʔe:f ! ↓
(0.5)
ʕAbdullah: Post Exp→ ↑ wela bidu:n moqa:bil ʔinnoch me ʔelan bi [ʕu:ki] ʃ yla: t ha:j? ↓
ʕana:n : ʃ
hu: ʔinta ibtíʃeyl (0.4) ibtíʃeyl moqa:bil mebley zahed.
ʕAbdullah: ↑ lәʔ? ʔinnoch ibtíʃeyl? (0.5) ʕidhom biaʔamnu:lek wadʔe:fih? ↓ =
ʕana:n : = ↑ ʔah
ʕAbdullah: Okay, what is the price that I will pay for that?
ʕana:n: The price of what?
(0.5)
ʕAbdullah: Do they give you these things for nothing?
ʕana:n: No, You have to work (0.4) for a small amount of money.
ʕAbdullah: No, do you work? (0.5) Do they offer you a job?

4. Silence and Embarrassment

The findings of the study demonstrate that silence can be used in conjunction when speakers are embarrassed, since the interlocutors are exhibiting their discomfiture by being silent.
section explores some cases where Jordanian speakers use silence in order to exhibit awkwardness.

4.1. Silence and Hesitation

The study finds that silence may accompany hesitation. In this sense, the speaker is hesitant about speaking because of an unexpected question or situation. For example, when the current speaker asks him or her an unanticipated question. The recipient is silent for a while, because s/he does not know what to say, because s/he is preparing an answer to that question. In this case, the speaker tends to lengthen the pause filler ‘ʔah’ or the last syllable of the last word before s/he is silent in order to have much time to think of what to say, or to escape from the topic. The speaker may produce a spate of talk in order to avoid answering the question directly. In extract (6) below, ʕana:n is asking ʕAbdullah whether he would like to nominate himself for the students’ Guild election. ʕana:n’s question is unanticipated by ʕAbdullah. This is why he lengthens the pause filler ‘ʔah’ before saying ‘laʔ’ (No) in line 5. Again, he is silent for 0.6 seconds in line 8 after lengthening the particle ‘laʔinuh’ (because). This silence comes after the unexpected question from ʕana:n ‘leːʃ’ (Why). This can be seen from his facial expressions and body language, since he does not keep eye contact with her and his voice tone is turbulent. He aims therefore to minimise the period of silence and to look for a logical reason for this question. He has five periods of silence in his turn; all these silences function to display his embarrassment. The longest silence of 0.8 seconds is in line 10. This silence occurs after prolonging ‘ʔo’ (And). This silence is meaningful, because it also occurs after saying that ‘I sometimes feel embarrassed when some people look at me’. He produces increments of talk in order to provide an indirect answer.

Extract (6), ʕana:n & ʕAbdullah( Female-Male, Strangers)

4 ʕana:n: FPP→ ↑laʔ ʔintixa:bat ʔaʔa:mʃ, ʔomrak fekarit tinzil laʔintixa:bat ?↓=
5 ʕAbdullah: SPP→ = ↑ʔa:::ːh laʔ↓
6 (0.3)
7 ʕana:n :↑ leːʃ?
8 ʕAbdullah: ↑laʔanu::ː↓ (0.6) ↑itrabeːt ʔino::ː ma ʔaʔa:mʃоб ilʔintibaːh ikΘiːr ʔatʃeːlih↓ (0.3)↑
9 yaʔni::ː ʔaʔa:mʃob ilʔintibaːh laʔino::ː↓ (0.5) ↑ʔayaːnen
10 ?iða haːst? ʔinoːː fi naːs ikΘiːr ibtinaboːli benhariʔa ʔo::ː↓ (0.8) ↑min innaʔaʔiyih
11 illi ma itʃawatʃ, ʔaθalan yeʕni ʔinoː↓ (0.3) ↑ʔatʃaʔa θala ittlifizuːn ʔaw ʔatʃaʔa ʔiʃi
12 feː mustaːhli↓.

ʕana:n: No! The university’s election, do you think of nominating yourself to the election?
ʕAbdullah: aʔ::ːːh , no!
(0.3)

ʕana:n: why?
ʕAbdullah: because (0.6) I was brought up not to draw attention to my family. (0.3) like, I don’t like to draw attention to myself, because (0.5) I sometimes feel embarrassed when people look at me, and (0.8) I am from those who do not, for example, like to (0.3) appear on Television, or something like that. It is impossible.
4.2. Silence and Interruption

Interruption is common in casual conversation, and occurs when one speaker cuts off the flow of the speech of the other speaker. This is called intrusive interruption. In addition, one speaker may interrupt the other speaker’s turn co-operatively in order to help him or her to remember something or to correct some information that s/he produces in his or her turn. Interruption violates the current speaker’s right to complete a turn (Zimmerman & West, 1975). Zimmerman and West (1975, p. 124) also observe that, “when the interrupting man completes his utterance, the woman pauses before she speaks again”. They do that to show "points at which the foci of topic development must be recollected after interruption"(Zimmerman & West, 1975, p.124). The results of the study indicate that silence may be used in conjunction with intrusive interruption, seizing the other speaker’s turn. This silence is purposeful, because it serves either to change the topic of the conversation, or to exhibit the speaker’s annoyance due to seizing his or her right in completing the turn. In addition, it functions as a positive strategy, as the interrupted interlocutor aims to indicate his or her resentment of being interrupted. Interruption therefore plays an important role in shaping this silence. In extract (7) below, ʕAbdullah is trying to tell ʕana:n that he believes in a saying about Hitler. She interrupts him before he says this by asking him ‘Have you read Hitler’s book, ‘My Struggle’? Next, he is silent for 0.8 seconds in line 411, since her interruption is unexpected. He is therefore thinking of a response to her question, or his train of thought has been cut off because of interruption. This is why he is silent. Moreover, he is trying to save. This is why he says that ‘but I know many things about Hitler’ in line 412. This is a positive politeness strategy to save his face.

**Extract (7), ʕAbdullah& ʕana:n (Male-Female, strangers)**

406 ʕAbdullah: FPP→↑ʔana fi:h fikreh ga:lha wa:hed (1.3) Hitlar
407 ʕana:n: SPP→↑ʔa:h
408 (0.7)
409 ʕAbdullah:Post Exp→ ʔinnuh ʔill
410 ʔana:n:
411 →(0.8)
412 ʕAbdullah: ʔe:h laʔ Bes baʕrif ʕan haya:t Hitler ikʕi:r.

ʕAbdullah: There is an idea said by someone (1.3) called Hitler.
ʕana:n: Yeah

(0.7)

ʕAbdullah: Like
ʕana:n: Have you read Hitler’s book, ‘My Struggle’?
→(0.8)
ʕAbdullah: No! But I know many things about Hitler.

5. Silence and Criticism

Another significant result to emerge from the data is that silence seems to be employed when criticising someone or something or when someone criticises him or herself. Silence serves as a means of substituting the most suitable words, while the speaker is considering the other
speaker’s feelings or his or her point of view. In addition, Jordanian speakers, as mentioned before, try to avoid saying words which may provide evidence against them in the future. In other words, Jordanian society is a positive politeness one where people try to save the face of other interlocutors during conversation in order to avoid being rude. In addition, Jordanian speakers tend to make criticism in an indirect way. In extract (8) below, Xa:lid is criticizing some students who are careless and cause trouble on campus. During his turn, Xa:lid pauses several times. One of the most significant silences is of 0.8 seconds in line 193. This silence occurs after the contrastive particle ‘bes’ (but). This silence serves the purpose of selecting the appropriate word. This can be seen from his following utterance, when he says, ‘this university is for intelligent students’. The most important lapse is 4.9 seconds in line 194. This lapse is meaningful, since it indicates the speaker’s bewilderment that these kinds of students are at university, according to Xa:lid’s point of view. Once again, this lapse indicates that silence is more eloquent than words in this situation. That is to say, whatever the speaker wishes to say will not convey or explain the whole idea. In addition, this lapse can be a positive politeness strategy to save the face of Dīya:ţ.

Extract (8), Xa:lid & Dīya:ţ: (Males, Friends)

Xa:lid: and they are well-educated (0.5) but, Oh God, believe me, my friend, (0.6) I saw in this university (0.3) some people who don’t deserve to be students. (0.2) Some of them (0.4) are from the same (0.2) place where I live(0.4). Ah, they are well-known (0.3). They do not get back home until 3:00 a.m. (0.6) However, (0.5) ah, (0.4) and they are morally decadent. There are many of them at our university, (0.3) but I was surprised that this university is only for (0.8) for clever people, (0.8) but, honestly, I was astonished (4.9). Like, you told me in the previous days, ah (0.5) the conflicts that occurred between students at university (0.8) a:::h (0.7) place where I live.

Dīya:ţ: Decadent peeple
Xa:lid: Decadent peeple
Dīya:ţ: Like, really, there is no trust (1.1) as they bring sharp tools to university.
Moreover, silence appears to be practised when the speaker is making self-criticism. This silence serves as a face-saving strategy, because the speaker is talking directly about him or herself. The other speaker remains silent during this period in order not to utter a word, which may be rude. In addition, silence is required in this situation and agreement is a dispreferred response. In extract (9) below, Ḍari:ʤ is criticising herself because she does not have a good enough voice and appearance to help her to be a successful presenter. In addition, she suffers a lot in order to be accepted to present a news brief at Yarmouk Radio. She is silent for 0.2 seconds in line 12. This silence is preceded by lengthening the negative particle ‘ma:’ (Nothing). Again, she is silent for 0.2 seconds in line 12. This silence is also preceded by a false start and a hesitation ‘miʃ hada:k ill mm’ (Not that Mm). These silences exhibit her reluctance to criticise herself.

Extract (9), Ṭaːriːq & Ḍariːdː (Male-Female, strangers)

10 Ṭaːriːq: FPP → ↑tˤab leʃ yeʕni leʃ?↓
11 Ḍariːdː: SPP → ↑laʔanu hata lama daxalit iliːdaːšeh ↑ma: (0.2) miʃ hada:k ill mm (0.2) yeʕni
12 isˤut ilitaryiːmiʃ hadaːk isˤut iliːdaːšiːye yeʕni itʕibit kˤiːr hata sˤurt ?tˤaʃ mawaːʤiʃ
13 biːdaːʃiːyarmuːk (0.6) mmm miʃ yeʕni ʕaːdiː jakli ʕaːdi yeʕni miʃ hadaːk iʃʃakil
14 ilmatːloːb biːdaːšah (0.4) binafs haːsiʔinnuh (0.2)? ana bimuntaːʤiʃ ?ajʕar.(0.3)
15 Ṭaːriːq: Okay why?, that is, why?
16 Ḍariːdː: because, when I started working in the Radio (0.2) not that Mmm (0.2) that is,
17 my voice is not like that the one which is required in the radio, that is, I
18 suffered a lot I got the chance to present news briefs in Yarmouk Radio(0.6).
19 Mmm, my appearance is usual, that is, I do not have that appearance which is
20 required as a presenter (0.4).I feel that (0.2) I am better in doing montage.

Silence can also be used when the current speaker criticises the recipient. The current speaker tends to be silent before uttering the criticising utterance, because s/he is thinking of the appropriate words to say in order to save face for the recipient. In addition, this utterance may be uttered with a rising intonation contour and in a form of question. In extract (10) below, Ṣanaːn is telling Ṣabdulhlaː that he should strengthen his character. He tells her that it is still early to do that. Next, she asks him about his age, and he says that he is 22 years old. Subsequently, there is a silence of 0.9 seconds in line 26. This silence is reflected in Ṣanaːn’s turn, because she is thinking of the best words to say to him. Her response is a criticism of him i.e. he is 22 years old and he has a weak personality, and he should do it now, because it will be too late for him as a man. Her silence is significant, since it heralds the criticising utterance.

Extract (10), Ṣanaːn & Ṣabdulhlaː (Female-Male, strangers)

24 Ṣanaːn: ʔadǐʃʔomrek ?
25 Ṣabdulhlaː: ʔiːOneːn ʔoʃʃreːn saneh
26 (0.9)
27 Ṣanaːn: fi dʔal waʔit ʔinnak bidak ʔiʔaowi faxsʔiʃtak! Ṣanaːn: how old are you?
28 Ṣabdulhlaː: I am 22 years old
Silence is employed when the current speaker is trying to avoid saying something discomfiting, such as cursing, or criticising something or somebody. The current speaker utters part of the critical word, and then s/he remains silent. S/he then draws back and compliments that person or that thing. In extract (11) below, Ŕissaa is criticising a writing course, because he is upset over it. This can be seen from his turn in line 21, when he starts cursing this course as ‘Allah yinʕan’ (damn). Next, he is silent for 0.8 seconds in line 21. This silence is significant, since he recognises that he is saying something awkward. This is why he remains silent. He then recoils and compliments this course in order to adjust what he has said.

Extract (11), Ŕissaa & ŔAbdullah (Males, friends)

21 Ŕissaa: FPP → ↑ fu: ḥasabu:lakʔ ṭiнт? writing ya zam Allah yiʕan (0.8) ↑ bes mali:h
22 [ mali:h wallah ṭinḥa mali:ha
23 ŔAbdullah: SPP → wallah bitdğanin wallah ṭarwaʔ minha ma fi:h ṭilma:dih ya zammih
24 ↑ qaqlak 90, qaqlak brēh ti dʒibithin.

 предусмотренное время на развитие сильного характера?

Silence may be also used when talking about a political issue, because Jordanian people think that talking about politics is risky, despite the fact that the Jordanian constitution guarantees freedom of speech. Silence plays a pivotal role in political conversations, since each speaker tends to choose his or her words carefully. In extract (12) below, .sendStatus is asking ʕAbdulna:sir about his opinion of the Jordanian government. ʕAbdulna:sir remains silent twice for 0.5 seconds in line 235 after saying ‘what shall I say about the government?’ He is selecting his words carefully, and he is trying to avoid saying a word that could be inappropriate. Again, ʕAbdulna:sir keeps silent for 1.4 seconds in line 236 after saying ‘Jordan is a sick body which is dying’. It seems that he recognises that he is saying something which is politically sensitive. Then he is silent for 0.9 seconds before explaining that there is financial corruption in Jordan. He also remains silent for 0.3 seconds in line 237. ʕAbdulna:sir is trying to avoid talking about this issue. This is why he tends to be silent from time to time. In addition, ʕAhmad’s question is unexpected to him, as he finds himself in a situation that he cannot avoid.

Extract (12), ʕAhmad & ʕAbdulna:sir( Males, strangers)

234 ʕAhmad: FPP → ↑ w qa:dit ʔilaʔi fi ilmu:dgtamaʔ fu:raʔi yak bilhukw:mah ↓=
235 ʕAbdulna:sir: SPP →= ↑ yeʕni fu:bidi qaqlak ʕan ilhukw:mah ↓(0.5) ∆ ilhukw:mah(0.5)
236 ↑ yeʕni ilurdun kulaʔ:tha ʔasad mari:dʔ qarab yxlu5(1.4) ↑ yeʕni lazim inyir ʔant
237 ↑ biqtw:l tạ:lib bitaγγy::r↓ (0.9) ↑ ya zamih ʔiIfasad wa:sil↓ (0.3) ↑ yeʕni ma bina:j
238 ↑ haδʔa↓ (0.9) ↑ bes ʕindana fasad ikO:i:r ihna
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Silence and Politeness in Jordanian Society  

Al-Harahsheh

Jayahmad: Or the opinion leader in the society, what is your opinion of the government?=

Al-Abdulnasir: Like what can I say about the government (0.5) the government (0.5) Jordan as a whole is like a sick body that is dying (1.4) like we should change, you said I should call for change.(0.9) oh, mate! There are many cases of corruption (0.3). That is, we do not like this (0.9) but we have a lot of corruption.

Silence may also co-occur with counter argument, especially between friends. The recipient keeps silent for a while before starting his or her counter argument against what has been said in the prior turn. This silence is noticeable, since the speaker is waiting for the current speaker to complete his or her turn in order to re-evaluate the idea that was initiated in the prior turn. In extract (13) below, ʔIxlαs⁵ is telling Sa⁵داد that she is thinking of having a job after graduation, because of the negative social view toward females who graduate and do not find work. However, Sa⁵داد thinks that a woman should not work after graduation. Instead, she should stay at home taking care of her children and her husband. Sa⁵داد remains silent for 2.2 seconds in line 295 before he starts his counter argument. This silence is essential, since it functions as a means of thinking of the best words to show his counter argument. In addition, he is selecting his word carefully in order to be polite with her.

Extract (13), ʔIxlαs⁵& Sa⁵داد :( Female-Male, friends)

ʔIxlαs⁵:FFF→↑ yeʕni maOalan ?ana mafru:d? ʔatxaradx⁵↓(0.5) ↑ma: ?aʃaylijj ʕala ?asαs

ʔinnuh ʔqtanaʃit ibkalaːmek okay=

Sa⁵داد : SPP→↑ʔaːh=

ʔIxlαs⁵: Post Exp→↑ma had yeʕni (0.2) ↑law kont ?ana beʃiːd illi  hawaːlai, ?aw heːk,↓↑ miʃ ilkol heːyifhamni illi ?intah ʕam tiːhkeːh bihkːo;↑ ‘t’il dersat ?w qaʃdat mailhaːʃ wa δːeːfiːh ma: ʔi ilaːʃ ?ai ʔiʃij’ ↑ʔiʃnit keːf?(0.4) ↑yeʕni heːk ilmuθtamaʃ ʕina ʔiʃna lazim illi bitxaraʃ yʃiʕaʃil sewaː; Kaːnet biniːʔaw feb.↓

Sa⁵داد: ↑ʔahuhh naḍərəh xaːt’iːʔah baʃtabirha yeʕni ʔinuː illi bitxaraʃ⁵↓

ʔIxlαs⁵ : Like, I will graduate. (0.5) I will not work because I am convinced by what you have said. Okay
Sa⁵داد:Yeah

ʔIxlαs⁵: Like nobody. (0.2) I will do something useful for people, or like this. Not all people will agree with you. They will say, ‘look, she studies and she does not have a job, she has nothing to do’. Do you understand?(0.4) like, this is the society’s view, when you graduate, you should work whether you are a man or a women.

(2.2)

Sa⁵داد: Yeah, I consider it to be wrong, like when you graduate

6. Silence and Swearing

Jordanian speakers may use silence in conjunction with swearing. Culturally speaking, when someone swears by God or by honour (especially men), it is a blasphemy but also indicates that s/he is honest. People tend to swear in order to confirm what they have said. They
therefore tend to keep silent after swearing in order to get the attention of the other participant. In addition, it is an opportunity to watch the other speaker’s reaction. In extract (14) below, ʕI:sa is telling ʕAbdullah about a hard-working instructor who is dedicated to his work. ʕI:sa is silent for 1.5 seconds in line 268 after swearing by God, ‘wa Allahi ilʕad'e:m’ (By God Almighty). This silence is common in Jordanian society, since it functions as a means of informing the other speaker that what will be said will be the truth.

**Extract (14), ʕI:sa & ʕAbdullah (Males, friends)**

268 ʕI:sa:FPP→ ↑ya zamih (0.3) ↑ʔaːh wa Allah ʕaziːz S'ubhi (0.4)↑ yaː ʕiːni (0.2)↑ wa Allahi
269 ilʕad'e:m (1.5) (Yawn). ↑bitlaːqeːh bijʃeh min kol galb ṭwrab.↓
270 (1.1)
271 ʕAbdullah:SPP→ ↑tˤayib yeʕni haːðʕa xuːf rabuh bixaːf.↓
ʕI:sa: Oh, mate! (0.3) yeah, by God ʕaziːz S'ubhi(0.4) is very nice(0.2) by Almighty God (1.5) (yawn) he explains the lesson very well.
(1.1)
ʕAbdullah: Okay, this man feels that God is controlling him.
Conclusion
The analysis of data shows that silence may be employed by Jordanian speakers in order to exhibit positive politeness (Al-harahsheh, 2012). It can be used when one speaker is waiting for the other in order to complete his or her turn. Silence is required while the current speaker is talking. Silence is practised in conjunction with embarrassment to indicate hesitation and interruption. Interruption is unwelcomed by Jordanian speakers in casual conversation, whether the interlocutors are friends or strangers as Jordanian society is a positive politeness society. The interrupted speaker may ask the interrupter to give him or her chance to complete his or her turn. For example, s/he may say, ‘mehna binso:lif’ (I am still speaking), ‘?ismaʕ’ (listen), ‘billah la ?iga:tˁ iʕni’ (by God, do not interrupt me). Silence is therefore an indication of politeness to the current speaker while s/he is talking. In addition, silence is practised to allocate turns between speakers i.e. the current speaker gives the turn to the recipient by remaining silent. Silence may be also used when someone criticises him or herself or another speaker.

In addition, silence in Jordanian society can be accompanied by politeness strategies in order to show respect and strengthen social rapport, as well to guarantee the continuity of the conversation (Al-Harahsheh, 2012). Moreover, the speaker may not have the desire to repeat him or herself, or s/he is trying to attract the other speaker. This enables the current speaker to think of what to say next. Interestingly, the recipient tolerates these silences and hesitations, which are better than dealing with errors. Again, silence can be used in conjunction with hesitation to avoid errors that may disrupt the conversation or disrupt the recipient per se. The current speaker is therefore silent before expressing ideas about which s/he may not be sure, because s/he aims to produce a planned and processed discourse, which is faultless. Following Hieke’s (1981) assumption, the production process is the most complicated process, as the current speaker may discover some errors in his or her own speech. S/he then utilises silence as a face saving strategy to repair these errors. S/he switches from a prospective to a retrospective process. As a result, s/he has to remain silent for a while or s/he employs a hesitation strategy. Therefore, silence can also be used as a politeness strategy in social interaction to avoid confrontation and disagreement (Jaworski & Stephens, 1998; Sifianou, 1997). More importantly, silence between strangers is uncomfortable in Jordanian society. It could be an indication of impoliteness, especially at the beginning of the conversation.

Silence may be used to exhibit embarrassment, such as hesitance, to avoid talking about the topic raised, because of fear of the camera and to express feelings. The current speaker sends an obvious message to the recipient that s/he is uncomfortable to talk about this issue, or that s/he is trying to escape from the topic. In addition, this is reflected in controlling the floor, since the speaker who tries to escape from the topic loses the floor domination. In addition, body movements play a pivotal role in expressing the real psychological state of the current speaker. They also help the recipient to understand what the current speaker has in mind. This is why the recipient tends to change the topic when s/he feels that it is embarrassing to the current speaker, or s/he may help him/her to withdraw from the topic.

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Exploring the Viability of Aptitude Tests in the EFL Placement Test: In Omani Context

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Abstract:
Despite having the best language teachers, curriculum and infrastructure, the progress of the adult ESL/EFL learners in the Arab World, especially in Oman is often daunting. The fixed assumption of language teachers towards the learners about the way the learners should respond to the curriculum or the teaching approach that should be adapted might be astonishingly adverse. In spite of the fact that educational psychology has for ages recognized, and emphasized the concept of individual differences, language teaching methods and the approaches have minimum consideration for the individual differences in language acquisition. Taking the review of the literature as the starting point and relying on the intensive researches and studies done on the significance of aptitude in a foreign language acquisition, the paper will briefly discuss: (1) Aptitude as the major factor in language learning (2) Background and various components of Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (3) Viability of MLAT in the Entrance Test of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training courses or in Oman’s Pre-University English General Foundation program (GFP).

Keywords: Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), language learning disability (LLD), General Foundation Program (GFP)
Introduction
The awareness of psychological theory of the learner and the language learning process can be a key to the successful language teaching. The crucial factors attributing to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English as a foreign Language (EFL) can be age, aptitude, affective and personality factors and other cognitive characteristics (Stern, 1983). Language learners’ exhibit varied levels in their progress. Irrespective of very similar academic success, some learners demonstrate better understanding of the second or the foreign language than their peers. Is this due to intelligence or general aptitude? What makes second language learning very difficult for some people?

The answer to this could be “Aptitude”. Carroll (1981) contends that language aptitude is not exactly the same as “intelligence”. “Educational psychology sees aptitude as a gift or talent which is above the general academic or reasoning ability” (Stern, pg.368). Second Language Aptitude in the layman’s language can be explained as the ‘knack’ of learning a language or the gift for acquiring a new language. This capability might either be genetic or might be the result of previous learning or the situations. From the functioning perspective, the time that each individual takes to accomplish a task may differ. Aptitude can be considered as inversely proportional to time.

\[ A \propto T \]

Under the best of the learning conditions, the lower the learning time, the higher is the Aptitude. In a controlled situation, people of even same age group and similar Academic background may differ in the capability and efficiency of doing a given task. Some might do the given task much faster than the others or others might completely fail to do it. This happens in foreign language learning too, and the reason is often aptitude. It has obvious implications on the language teaching and language learning. Hence it is essential to comprehend the contribution of Aptitude in foreign language learning and have a provision to measure it.

Literature review
Sweet (1964) and Palmer (1968) strongly advocated psychological components of language teaching theory. Palmer (1968) defines Language aptitude as the composite of different elements:

- the student of even temperament, an expert penman, an artist in mimicry, an expert in the linguistic, pedagogic, and mnemonic sciences, unspoiled by previous defective study and possessing a powerful incentive, is more likely to study a foreign language with success than one who is his antithesis in every particular.’ (p.33)

Further, Carroll (1973) defines aptitude as the "rate at which persons at the secondary school, university and adult level learn to criterion" (p. 5), which is measurable through language aptitude tests. Stern (1983, pg: 320) cites that the mental test movement gained momentum in the USA during interwar years. There was several ‘objective’ language tests developed during this period. Henmon’s language aptitude test in 1920 was the first language test that was followed by the Foreign Language Prognosis test developed by Luria and Orleans in 1928 and by Symonds in 1930. However, these tests did not gain the attention of many. Symond’s Language Prognosis Test emphasized the language teaching approach that stressed the capacity to handle grammatical
concepts and to translate from one’s own language to the target language. In the 50’s and 60’s Carroll and Sapon’s Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) in 1959 and their Elementary Modern Language Aptitude Test (EMLAT) in 1967 and Pimsleur (1966) language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) were the few modern aptitude tests which were developed and had all the characteristics of audiolingual theory. These tests were much advanced and could assess learners’ capability of identifying speech sound, capacity to relate sounds to a given set of symbols, rote memory in a language learning task, sensitivity for sentence structure and an inductive language learning capacity.

Modern Aptitude Test

According to Carroll & Sapon (2002) the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) does not take aptitude as a single entity, rather it is a composite of different characteristics with varying degrees that contribute to language learning. In the fifties Carroll with the cooperation of Stanley Sapon, undertook his own studies on aptitude testing and prepared his well known Language Aptitude Test. According to it, there are three major components of Modern Aptitude Test. The first is phonetic coding ability; the ability to pay attention to and discriminate the speech sounds of the language. The second is grammatical sensitivity, which is the individual’s ability to pay attention to the formal characteristics of a language. MLAT’s third component is "inductive ability "; the ability to "examine language material... and from this to notice and identify patterns and correspondences and relationships involving either meaning or grammatical form" (Carroll, 1973, p. 8).

Moreover, Stern (1983) does a comparative study of various language aptitude tests and identifies four major characteristics of these tests:

1. The auditory Capacity: speech sound discrimination
2. Sound- symbol relation or the phonetic coding ability: relation of speech sound to some script
3. Grammatical Ability: learner’s awareness of grammatical terminology, it also involves a conscious meta-awareness of grammar.
4. Verbal memory or rote learning: ability to learn and retain associations between words in a new language and their meaning in English

As the characteristics of MLAT are the major abilities in learning any foreign language so they should be taken into consideration while enrolling the learners in any foreign language course.

Significance of MLAT as a part of an Entrance Examination in a Language Course:

According to Carroll & Sapon (2002) MLAT helps in predicting how well an individual can learn a foreign language in a given amount of time, within a given condition. Or say, language aptitude test helps in determining how quickly and easily an individual can cope up with a language training program. Moreover, language aptitude test results are helpful in grouping the students in roughly homogeneous groups so that they can be taught more effectively.

Furthermore, American Educational Research Association (2006) advocate MLAT can also be effectively used for placement tests. Students with higher language aptitude scores can learn with a quicker pace. Hence, they can be placed in the higher level of language classrooms while students with lower scores may be placed in the lower levels of language classrooms so
that they may be able to absorb the material more easily. Nevertheless, given good instructional support, plus enough time and exposure, virtually all learners can learn a foreign language.

In addition, MLAT helps in establishing the language learning disability (LLD). It is often astonishing that a student with high academic grades fails to score well or cope with a foreign language; this can be due to a language learning disability (LLD). If a student holds reasonable or good academic scores but achieves very low in MLAT, then it might be an indicator of LLD. Language learning can be a horrifying experience for such students and may lead to anxiety and de motivation. However, the good news for the foreign language teacher is once LLD is identified then it is not impossible to deal with it. Ganschow & Sparks (1995) found two approaches which were different from the normal traditional way of teaching a Foreign Language. The first was “Orton-Gillingham method” of teaching phonology, reading and spelling to the language learning deficient students and the other was based on the principles of teaching LLD learners. This suggested making changes such as; reducing the syllabus to the essential elements, reducing the pace of instruction, vocabulary demand and incorporating as much visual/tactile/kinesthetic (i.e. multisensory) stimulation and support as possible. This can enhance the language learning process of the learners with LLD.

Ehrman (1996) and Wesche (1981) recognized the potential diagnostic value of the test because different parts of the test deal with different aspects of language ability such as phonetics, phonology, grammar, and rote memory. Guidance counsellors have used scores from different parts of the test in building profiles of students’ strengths and weaknesses and in advising them how best to attack their curriculum.

To conclude, the studies done by Carroll (1981), Sapon (2002) and Stern (1983) and the American Educational Research Association (2006) have very well established the significance of MLAT in the identifying the potentials and the learning ability of foreign language learners. Hence incorporation of MLAT as one of the components in the placement tests of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) must be explored.

**Viability of MLAT as a part of an Entrance Examination in an English General Foundation Programme (GFP) in Oman**

Modern Language Aptitude Test has become very popular and effective in identifying the language aptitude of the learners and then placing them in the right level. Hence, the viability of incorporating MLAT as a section in the language placement test should be taken into consideration. The sections that follow will look into: (i) the current status of English language in Oman, (ii) needs and profile of adult Omani learners enrolling in the English language foundation programme, (iii) challenges faced by the General Foundation Programme(GFP) in the placement tests and (iv) and the possibility of using MLAT as a remedy to it.

**Status of English in Oman**

According to Graddol (2006) current soaring trends in learning English may result in the growth of 2 billion English language learners in the next 10 to 15 years and he envisions a scenario when English language ability will be the baseline skill in countries where English is taught as a foreign language today. This may prove true for the developing country like Oman too. The economic boom in Oman after 1975 has made the country cosmopolitan and it has become one of the most promising lands in the Arab world. The growing expatriate population, modification, enhancement and the expansion of the educational system and its affiliation with
the Western Universities has necessitated English language learning. However, the status of English in the country is still a foreign language, as it is neither the language of legislation nor is it spoken widely by the natives of Oman.

The growing need of English language in the country has been identified and the Ministry of Education is gradually reforming the educational system to address the need of the hour. According to Simon Borg (2006) there are two strands of English curriculum running parallel in Oman: Older General Education Curriculum and New Basic Education curriculum. In the former older curriculum, English was taught at the age of 10 (grade 4), while in the latter children start learning at the age of 6 (Grade 1). However, after the completion of the transitional phase, the new Basic Education system is to be followed uniformly.

Despite the best effort taken by the educational system and the educators the student’s exposure to the language still remains limited.

**Omani Adult Learner’s Profile enrolling in General foundation Programmes (GFP)**

English is a foreign language in Oman and its use is limited to certain educational and professional contexts. It is taught as one of the subjects in the school curriculum. However, the medium of instruction of other subjects still remain to be Arabic. As motioned earlier learners who enroll for the General foundation Programme (Pre- University) are mainly the students who are the secondary graduates of old General Education Curriculum. The students are usually in the age group of 18 to 45. Therefore, either they are fresh secondary graduates or the older students who have been working for some time and have a better exposure to the language. However, irrespective of the exposure opportunities available to the learners, they have to take a quick journey of about one year, in which they begin as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with rudimentary language and then reach the destination as English as a Second Language (ESL) learners where English is taught for Academic purpose (EAP) too. Further, they have to take Academic IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam as an exit examination from the English General Foundation Program (GFP). The Band (marks) scored in the IELTS exam is the entry criteria for the specialization program. The pre requisite IELTS score needed varies between Band 4.5 to 6, which depends on the kind of Academic or the Professional course that the learner wants to do. In the specialized Academic or Professional courses, the medium of instruction is English. The quick transitional phase from EFL to ESL is exigent for both the learners and the educators.

**Challenges for GFP in the language placement tests**

On the other hand, the challenges are also quite numerous for the department of GFP as it is the one entrusted with the responsibility of placing the students in the right levels of EFL courses, based on the language proficiency of the individual student. The entrance exams are usually formulated at the departmental level, where the performance and the scores in the entrance exam are the main criteria that decides the level in which the learner will be enrolled.

The placement examination includes four components: Grammar, Vocabulary, Reading and Writing. The first three mentioned components include questionnaire in an objective format. Based on the scores achieved in the placement examination, the students are placed in various levels of GFP. But, the objective format of the questionnaire often provides student an opportunity to score by fluke and does not reflect the true level of their language proficiency.
Additionally, these tests do not consider the other major factors that contribute to language learning.

Thus according to the author’s experience as a language teacher such placement test may not serve the real purpose of placing the student in the appropriate level of the language program and hence may hamper the process of effective language teaching and learning.

Conclusion:

Amongst some major factors attributing to language learning, the right Aptitude for the language is essential. MLAT is a tool which can demonstrate quantitative assessment of the learner’s aptitude for the target language. Incorporation of MLAT in the placement examination of the language course may lend a hand in placing the learners in the appropriate level. MLAT can help foreign language teaching in two ways; firstly, the scores can help to ascertain the time a learner will need to accomplish the given language course. The individuals scoring low on the MLAT can be placed on the lower level in the course so that they may get an opportunity to spend more time for learning the language and acquire the required level of proficiency. Secondly, it helps in the diagnosis of a foreign language learning disability (LLD) or to rule out the possibility of LLD.

Future Research:

It is suggested that the factors contributing to language learning be taken into account. MLAT should be considered as a part of entrance examination to help in identifying the correct language proficiency level of the learners who are aspiring to enroll in English Language Programme. This will also help in identifying the language learning deficiency (LLD), if the learner has any. The effectiveness and the scope of MLAT in the entrance exam may be further tested via further research.

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Book Review

Global English and Arabic: Issues of Language, Culture, and Identity offers a timely and insightful view of the current state of the Arabic language in the Middle East - North Africa (MENA) region. The book is Volume 31 in a series “Contemporary Studies in Descriptive Linguistics”. Divided into twelve chapters, each section highlights a different area of the MENA region by describing various research projects that have investigated issues surrounding the use of Arabic in light of the increasing use of English as the lingua franca. While each author comes from a different perspective in a different context, the editors note “the overall message from most of the chapters in this book is that there is greater need for a move towards bilingualism…” (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011, p. viii).

The authors use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in their research approaches, which carry sound and clearly explicated research designs. Their work represents the start of a critical investigation in the field of ELT in the Arab world. Current research indicates that the development of a strong L1 is important in the development of a strong L2. Furthermore, bilingualism brings about even greater linguistic, cognitive, and educational
benefits and therefore is a better option for language teaching and development. The authors espouse this view, and suggest the need for educators and policy-makers to reconsider and redesign existing curricula to meet this need.

The scope of this volume is large. In chapter three, Lynne Ronesi discusses her qualitative study investigating female undergraduate students’ perspectives as English language writing tutors coming from a native Arabic background. She uses writing samples and interviews as her primary data sources, privileging students’ voices and words to explicate their understanding of their own language identity. In contrast, Anissa Daoudi’s chapter ten, entitled “Computer-mediated Communication: The Emergence of e-Arabic in the Arab World”, delves into a more quantitative study involving millions of words from an internet corpus. In the middle of this spectrum is Pessoa and Rajakumar’s chapter “The Impact of English-medium Higher Education: The Case of Qatar”, that investigates student populations at two universities through surveys, self-assessments, focus groups, and personal interviews. Despite the wide-ranging topics and methodologies used, the book maintains a thematic focus on the book’s subtitle, “Issues of Language, Culture, and Identity.” Furthermore, all of the authors’ studies have been firmly grounded in solid, background research and appropriate theory current to these interdisciplinary fields of study.

The weakness of this book stems from the fact that it emerges from an exceptionally under-researched area. As the editors acknowledge, this edited collection represents simply an entry point into a much deeper issue: “we hoped it would be a start towards helping educators and policy makers look into the role English has taken on in many of the Arab countries” (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011, p. ix). Each country’s complex political, social, and economic status varies, and therefore approaches to policy-making in each region will vary considerably. Consequently, this book leaves the reader in search of further inquiry into each particular context. Al-Issa and Dahan also stop short of offering any concrete advice or possible solutions to the challenges faced in the Arab world with regard to language policies. Nonetheless, the publication of this collection represents a groundbreaking move that highlights the dire need for further research both in the long and short-term.

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Reference